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THE ROVER BOYS' IN THE JUNGLE

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

Book #3

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THE ROVER BOYS IN THE JUNGLE

Or
Stirring Adventures in Africa
By Arthur M. Winfield
(Edward Stratemeyer)

INTRODUCTION

My dear boys:

This volume, "The Rover Boys in the jungle," is the third story of the "Rover Boys Series," and while a complete tale in itself, forms a companion story to "The Rover Boys at School" and "The Rover Boys on the Ocean," which preceded it.

In the former volumes I told you much of the doings of Dick, Tom, and Sam at Putnam Hall and during a remarkable chase on the Atlantic Ocean. In the present story the scene is shifted from the military academy, where the boys are cadets, to the wilds of Africa, whither the lads with their uncle have gone to look for Anderson Rover, the boys' father, who had disappeared many years before. A remarkable message from the sea causes the party to leave this country, and they journey to Africa, little dreaming of all the stirring adventures which await them in the heart of the Dark Continent. How they battle against their many perils, and what the outcome of their remarkable search is, I will leave for the pages that follow to explain.

In conclusion, let me state that I am extremely grateful for the kind favor given the previous volumes of this series, and I sincerely trust that the present tale merits a continuance of your support.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,
EDWARD STRATEMEYER
November 10, 1899

THE ROVER BOYS IN THE JUNGLE

CHAPTER I

UNPLEASANT NEWS

"Back to Putnam Hall again, boys! Hurrah!"

"Yes, back again, Tom, and glad of it," returned Dick Rover. "I can tell you, the academy is getting to be a regular second home."

"Right you are, Dick," came from Sam Rover, the youngest of the three brothers. "I'd rather be here than up to the farm, even if Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha are kind and considerate. The farm is so slow—"

"While here we have our full share of adventures and more," finished Tom. "I wonder what will happen to us this term? The other terms kept us mighty busy, didn't they?"

"I'm not looking for any more outside adventures," said Dick, with a serious shake of his head. "Our enemies have been disposed of, and I don't want, to hear of or see them again."

"Nor I—but we'll hear of them, nevertheless, mark my words. The Baxters won't leave us rest. They are a hard crowd, and Buddy Girk is just as bad," finished Tom.

It was the opening of the spring term at Putnam Hall Military Academy, and the three Rover boys had just come up from Cedarville in the carryall, driven by Peleg Snuggers, the general-utility man of the place. Their old chums, Frank Harrington, Fred Garrison, Larry Colby, and a number of others, had already arrived, so the boys did not lack for company. As they entered the spacious building genial Captain Putnam

greeted each with a hearty handshake, and a pleasant word also came to them from George Strong, the head assistant.

For the benefit of those who have not read the other books of this series, entitled "The Rover Boys at School" and "The Rover Boys on the Ocean," I would state that the Rover boys were three in number, Dick being the oldest, Tom next, and Sam the youngest, as already mentioned. Whether the boys were orphans or not was a question which could not be answered. Upon the death of their mother, their father, a rich mine owner and geological expert, had left the boys in the care of his brother, Randolph Rover, an eccentric gentleman who devoted his entire time to scientific farming. Mr. Anderson Rover had then journeyed to the western coast of Africa, hoping to locate some valuable gold mines in the heart of the Dark Continent. He had plunged into the interior with a number of natives, and that was the last heard of him, although Mr. Randolph Rover had made diligent inquiries concerning his whereabouts.

All of the boys were bright, fun-loving fellows, and to keep them out of mischief Randolph Rover had sent them off to Putnam Hall, a first class school, located some distance from Cedarville, a pretty town on Lake Cayuga, in New York State. Here the lads had made numerous friends and incidentally a number of enemies.

Of the friends several have already been named, and others will come to the front as our story proceeds. Of the enemies the principal ones were Arnold Baxter, a man who had tried, years before, to defraud the boys' father out of a gold mine in the West, and his son Dan, who had once been the bully of Putnam Hall. Arnold Baxter's tool was a good-for-nothing scamp named Buddy Girk, who had once robbed Dick of his watch. Both of these men were now in jail charged with an important robbery in Albany, and the Rover boys had aided in bringing the men to justice. Dan, the bully, was also under arrest, charged with the abduction of Dora Stanhope. Dora, who was Dick Rover's dearest friend, had been carried off by the directions of Josiah Crabtree, a former teacher of Putnam Hall, who wished to marry Mrs. Stanhope and thus get his hands on the money the widow held in trust for her daughter, but the abduction

had been nipped in the bud and Josiah Crabtree had fled, leaving Dan Baxter to shoulder the blame of the transaction. How Dora was restored to her mother and what happened afterward, old readers already know.

A winter had passed since the events narrated above, and before and after the holidays the Rover boys had studied diligently, to make up for the time lost on that never-to-be-forgotten ocean chase. Their efforts had not been in vain, and each lad had been promoted to the next higher class, much to Randolph Rover's satisfaction and the joy of their tender-hearted Aunt Martha.

"The boys are all right, even if they do love to play pranks," was Randolph Rover's comment, when he heard of the promotions. "I trust they improve their time during the term to come."

"They are good boys, Randolph," returned Mr. Rover. "They would not be real boys if they did not cut up once in a while. As to their daring —why, they simply take after their father. Poor man. If only we knew, what had become of him."

"Yes, a great weight would be lifted from our shoulders, Martha, if we knew that. But we do not know, and there seems to be no way of finding out. I have written to the authorities at various places in Africa until I know not whom to address next."

"He must be dead, otherwise he would write or come home, Randolph.
He was not one to keep us in the dark so long."

"I cannot believe my brother dead, and the boys will not believe it either. Do you know what Dick said to me before he left for school? He said, that if we didn't get word he was going to Africa some day to hunt his father up."

"To Africa! What will that boy do in such a jungle, and among such fierce natives? He will be killed!"

"Perhaps not. The boy is uncommonly shrewd, when it comes to dealing with his enemies. Just look how nicely he and Tom and Sam served Arnold Baxter and those others. It was wonderful doings—for boys."

"Yes, but they may not be so successful always, Randolph. I should hate to see them run into any more, danger."

"So should I, my dear. But they will take care of themselves, I feel that more and more every day," concluded Randolph Rover; and there, for the time being, the subject was dropped.

"I wonder what has become of old Josiah Crabtree?" remarked Dick Rover, as he and his brothers walked around the parade ground to inspect several improvement which Captain Putnam had caused to be made.

"I'm sure I can't guess," answered Tom.

"Like as not he became scared to death. I suppose you'll be satisfied if he keeps away from Dora and her mother in the future?"

"Yes; I never want to set eyes on him again, Tom. He worried the widow half to death with his strange ways."

"I wonder how the Baxters feel to be locked up?" put in Sam. "I know Arnold Baxter is used to it, but it's a new experience for Dan."

"Dan is as bad as his father," broke in Larry Colby, who had joined the brothers. "I was glad to hear that Mumps had turned over a new leaf and cut the bully dead."

"Oh, so were all of us!" said Tom. "By the way, do you know where Mumps is now? In the mining business, out West, acting as some sort of a clerk."

"A spell in the West will take the nonsense out of him," came from Dick. "It was a great pity he ever got under Dan Baxter's influence I wonder how Arnold Baxter is getting along? He was quite severely wounded, you know, during that tussle on the yachts."

"He's about over that, so Frank Harrington says," replied Larry. "I'll wager he is mighty bitter against you fellows for having put him where he is."

"It was his own, fault, Larry. If a person is going to do wrong he must take the consequences. Mr. Baxter might today be a fairly well-to-do mine owner of the West and Dan might be a leading cadet here. But instead they both threw themselves away—and now they must take what comes."

"My father used to say it took all kind of people to make a world," went on Larry. "But I reckon we could do without the Baxter and the Buddy Girk kind."

"And the Josiah Crabtree kind," added Sam. "Don't forget that miserable sneak."

"Perhaps Crabtree has reformed, like Mumps."

"It wasn't in him to reform, Larry," came from Tom. "Oh, how I detested him, with his slick, oily tongue! I wish they had caught him and placed him where he deserved to be, with the Baxters."

"Yes, and then we could—" began Sam, when he stopped. "Hullo, Frank, what are, you running so fast about?" he cried.

"Just got a letter from my father!" burst out Frank Harrington, as he came up out of breath. "I knew you would want to hear the news. Dan Baxter has escaped from jail and the authorities don't know where to look for him."

CHAPTER II

NEWCOMERS AT THE ACADEMY

"Dan Baxter has escaped!" repeated Dick. "That is news indeed. Does your father give my particulars?"

"He says it is reported that the jailer was sick and unable to stop Dan."

"Humph! Then they must have had some sort of a row," put in Tom. "Well, it does beat the nation how the Baxters do it. Don't you remember how Arnold Baxter escaped from the hospital authorities last year?"

"Those Baxters are as slick as you can make them," said Frank. "I've been thinking if Dan would dare to show himself around Putnam Hall."

"Not he!" cried Larry. "He'll travel as far can and as fast as he can."

"Perhaps not," mused Dick. "I rather he will hang around and try to help his father out of prison."

"That won't help him, for the authorities will be on strict guard now. You know the stable door is always locked after the horse is stolen."

At this there was a general laugh, and when it ended a loud roll of a drum made the young cadets hurry to the front of the parade ground.

"Fall in, Companies A and B!" came the command from the major of the battalion, and the boys fell in. Dick was now a first lieutenant, while Tom and Sam were first and second sergeants respectively.

As soon as the companies were formed they were marched around the Hall and to the messroom. Here they were kept standing in a long fine while George Strong came to the front with half a dozen new pupils.

"Young gentlemen, I will introduce to you several who will join your ranks for this season," said the head assistant. Then he began to name the half dozen. Among others they included a round-faced German youth named Hans Mueller, and a tall, lank, red-haired boy, of Irish descent who rejoiced in the name of Jim Caven.

"I'll wager the Dutch boy is full of fun," whispered Sam to Tom. "You can see it in his eyes."

"I don't like the looks of that Jim Caven," returned Tom. "He looks like a worse sneak than Mumps ever was."

"I agree there. Perhaps we had better keep, our eyes open for him."

Despite this talk, however, the newcomers were welcomed cordially, and to the credit of the students be it said that each old cadet did all in his power to make the new boys feel perfectly at home.

"Mine fadder vos von soldier py der Cherman army," said Hans Mueller. "Dot's vy he sent me py a military academy ven we come py dis country."

"Glad to know you intend to help us fight the Indians," answered Tom innocently.

"Me fight der Indians? Vot you means py dot?" demanded Hans, his light-blue eyes wide open with interest.

"Why, don't you know that we are here to learn how to fight Indians?" went on Tom, with a side wink at those around him.

"No; I dink me dis vos von school only."

"So it is—a school to learn how to shoot and scalp."

"Schalp! Vot's dot?"

"Cut an Indian's top-knot off with a knife, this way," and Tom made an imaginary slash at Hans' golden locks.

"Ton't do dot!" stammered the German boy, falling back. "No, I ton't vant to learn to schalp, noputty."

"But you are willing to fight the Indians, are you not?" put in Sam. "We are all going to do that, you know."

"I ton't like dem Indians," sighed Hans. "I see me some of dem vonde by a show in Chermany, und I vos afraid."

At this a laugh went up. How much further the joke would have been carried it is impossible to say, but just then a bell rang and the boys had to go into the classroom. But Tom remembered about the Indians, as the others found out about a week later.

As the majority of the scholars had been to the Hall before, it did not take long for matters to become settled, and in a few days all of the boys felt thoroughly at home, that is, all but Jim Caven, who went around with that same sneaking look on his face that Tom had first noticed. He made but few friends, and those only among the smaller boys who had plenty of pocket money to spend. Caven rarely showed any money of his own.

With the coming of spring the cadets formed, as of old, several football teams, and played several notches, including one with their old rivals, the pupils of Pornell Academy. This game they lost, by a score of four to five, which made the Pornellites feel much better, they having lost every game in the past. (For the doings of the Putnam Hall students previous to the arrival at that institution of the Rover boys see, "The Putnam Hall Series," the first volume of which is entitled, "The Putnam Hall Cadets."—Publisher)

"Well, we can't expect to beat always," said Tom, who played quarterback on the Putnam team. "We gave them a close brush."

"Yes, and we might have won if Larry hadn't slipped and sprained his ankle," put in Sam. "Well, never mind; better luck next time. We'll play them again next fall." Sam was right so far as a game between the rival academies was concerned, but none of the Rover boys were on hand to take part in the contest—for reasons which the chapter to follow will disclose.

With the football came kite-flying, and wonderful indeed were some of the kites which the boys manufactured.

"I can tell you, if a fellow had time he could reduce kite-flying to a regular science," said Dick.

"Oh, Dick, don't give us any more science!" cried Sam. "We get enough of science from, Uncle Randolph, with his scientific farming,

fowl-raising, and the like. I would just as lief fly an old-fashioned kite as anything."

"Dick is right, though," put in Fred Garrison. "Now you have a big flat-kite there, three times larger than mine. Yet I'll wager my little box kite will fly higher than your kite."

"Done!" cried Sam. "What shall the wager be?"

"Ice cream for the boys of our dormitory," answered Fred.

"All right, but how is a fellow to get the cream if he loses?"

"That's for him to find out, Sam. If I lose I'll sneak off to Cedarville, as Dick did once, and buy what I need."

"Ice cream for our room it is," said. Frank.

"And mum's the word about the wager, or Captain Putnam will spoil the whole affair if he gets wind of it."

"Make me stakeholder," grinned Tom. "I'd just like to lay hands on about two quarts of chocolate cream."

"There won't be any stakeholder," said Dick.

"But when is this kite-flying contest to come off?"

The matter was talked over, and it was decided to wait until the next Saturday, which would be, as usual, a half-holiday. In the meantime some of the other boys heard there was going to be a contest, although they knew nothing of the wager made, and half a dozen other matches were arranged.

Saturday proved to be cool and clear with a stiff breeze blowing directly from the west. This being so, it was decided, in order to get clear of the woods in front of the Hall, to hold the contests on Baker's Plain, a level patch of ground some distance to the westward.

The cadets were soon on the way, shouting and laughing merrily over the sport promised. Only a few remained behind, including Jim Caven, who gave as his excuse that he had a headache.

"I'm glad he is not with us," said Dick. "I declare, for some reason, I can't bear to have him around."

"Nor I," returned Frank. "It's queer, but he gives me the shivers whenever he comes near me."

"It's a wonder he came here at all. He doesn't belong in our style of a crowd."

To reach Baker's Plain the cadets had to make a detour around a high cliff which overlooked a rocky watercourse which flowed into Cayuga Lake. They moved slowly, as nobody wished to damage his kite, and it was after two o'clock before all hands were ready for the first trial at kite-flying.

"Gracious, but it is blowing!" cried Tom.

"Sam, have you a good strong cord on your kite?"

"The strongest I could get," answered the youngest Rover. "I guess it is stronger than what Fred has."

"My kite won't pull like yours," said Fred Garrison. "All ready?"

"Yes."

"Then up they go—and may the best kite win!"

Soon a dozen kites of various kinds were soaring in the air, some quite steadily and others darting angrily from side to side. One went up with a swoop, to come down with a bang on the rocks, thus knocking itself into a hundred pieces.

"Mine cracious, look at dot!" burst out Hans Mueller. "Mine Gretchen kite vos busted up—und I spent me feefteen cents on him alreety!" and a roar went up.

"Never mind, Hans," said Dick. "You can help sail the Katydid. She will pull strong enough for two, I am sure."

The Katydid was a wonderful affair of silver and gold which Dick had constructed on ideas entirely his own. It went up slowly but surely and proved to be as good a kite as the majority.

A number of girls living in the neighborhood, bad heard of the kite-flying contests, and now they came up, Dora Stanhope with the rest, accompanied by her two cousins, Grace and Nellie Laning. As my old readers may guess, Dick was very attentive to Dora, and his brothers were scarcely less so to the two Laning sisters.

"And how is your mother?" Dick asked of Dora, during the course of their conversation.

"She is much better," replied Dora, "although she is still weak from her sickness."

"Does she ever mention Josiah Crabtree?"

"She mentioned him once. She said that she had dreamed of him and of you, Nick."

"Me? And what was the dream?"

"Oh—it was only a silly affair, Dick, not worth mentioning."

"But I would like to know what it was."

"Well, then, she dreamed that both of you were in a big forest and he was about to attack you with a gun or a club, she couldn't tell which. She awoke screaming and I ran to her side, and that is how she told me of the dream."

CHAPTER III

AN OLD ENEMY TURNS UP

"That was certainly an odd dream," said Dick, after a short pause. "I am sure I never want to meet Josiah Crabtree under such circumstances."

"It was silly, Dick—I'd forget it if I was you."

"And she never mentioned the man at any other time?"

"No. But I am certain she is glad he has left for parts unknown. I never, never, want to see him again," and the girl shivered.

"Don't be alarmed, Dora; I don't think he will dare to show himself," answered Dick, and on the sly gave her hand a tight squeeze. They were warmer friends than ever since Dick had rescued her from those who had abducted her.

The kite-flying was now in "full blast," as Sam expressed it, and the boys had all they could do to keep the various lines from becoming tangled up. His own kite and Fred's were side by side and for a long time it looked as if neither would mount above the other.

"Run her up, Fred! You can win if you try!" cried several of the cadets.

"Play out a bit more, Sam; you haven't given your kite all the slack she wants," said others. So the talk ran on, while each contestant did the best to make his kite mount higher. In the meantime the wind kept increasing in violence, making each kite pull harder than ever.

"It's a dandy for flying," panted Tom, who was holding his kite with all the strength he possessed. "Something must give way soon," and something did give way. It was the string he was holding, and as it

snapped he went over on his back in such a comical fashion that all, even to the girls, had to laugh.

"Torn! Tom! What a sight!" burst out Nellie Laning. "You should have brought a stronger cord."

"If I had I'd a-gone up in the clouds," answered Tom ruefully. "That's the last of that kite, I suppose; if I—"

"The string has caught on Sam's kite!" interrupted Grace Laning. "Oh, my! See both of them going up!"

"Now you can win, Sam!" laughed Dora. "Fred, your flying is nowhere now."

"He didn't calculate to fly one kite against two," answered Fred. "Hold on, Sam, where are you going? The cliff is over in that direction!" he yelled suddenly.

"I—I know it!" came back the alarming answer. "But I can't stop myself!"

"He can't stop himself!" repeated Dora.

"Oh, stop him somebody, before he goes over the cliff!"

"Let go of the line!" shouted Dick. "Don't go any closer to the cliff!"

"I—I can't let go! The line is fast around my wrist!" gasped poor Sam. "Oh, dear, it's cutting me like a knife!"

"He's in a mess," came from Frank. "If he isn't careful he'll go over the cliff, as sure as he's born!"

"Throw yourself down!" went on Dick, and, leaving his kite in Hans Mueller's care, he ran after his brother.

By this time Sam had gained a few bushes which grew but a dozen feet away from the edge of the cliff, that at this point was nearly forty feet in height. With his right hand held a painful prisoner, he clutched at the bushes with his left.

"I've got the bushes, but I can't hold on long!" he panted, as Dick came close. "Help me, quick!"

Scarcely had the words left his mouth when the bushes came up by the roots and poor Sam fell over on his side. Then came another strong puff of wind, and he was dragged to the very edge of the rocky ledge!

"I'm going!" he screamed, when, making a mighty leap, Dick caught him by the foot.

"Catch the rock—anything!" cried the older brother. "If you don't you'll be killed!"

"Save me!" was all poor Sam could say. "Oh, Dick, don't let me go over!"

"I'll do my best, Sam," was Dick's answer, and he held on like grim death.

By this time half a dozen boys were running to the scene. Dora Stanhope followed, and as she came up she pulled a tiny penknife from her pocket.

"Can't I cut the line with this?" she asked, timidly, as she pushed her way to Dick's side.

"Yes, Yes; cut it!" moaned Sam. "Oh, my wrist is almost cut in two!"

Stooping low, Dora sawed away at the kite line, which was as taut as a string on a bass fiddle. Suddenly there was a loud snap and the cord parted. Sam and Dick fell back from the edge of the cliff, while the entangled kites soared away for parts unknown.

"Thank Heaven you cut the line, Dora!" said Dick, who was the first to recover from the excitement of the situation. He saw that Dora was trembling like a leaf, and he hastened to her support, but she pushed him away and pointed to Sam.

"Don't mind me—I am all right, Dick," she said. "Go care for poor Sam. See how his wrist is bleeding! Oh, how dreadful!"

"Here is my handkerchief; he had better bind it up with that," said Grace Laning, as she offered the article.

"We'll wash the wound first," put in Frank, and raced off for some water. Soon he returned with his stiff hat full, and the cut on Sam's wrist was tenderly washed by the Laning girls, who then bound it up with the skill of a hospital surgeon.

The kite-flying continued for the balance of the afternoon. But Sam and Dick had had enough of it, and, along with Tom, they took a stroll along the lake front with Dora Stanhope and Grace and Nellie. Of course

both boys and girls talked a whole lot of nonsense, yet all enjoyed the walk very much.

"This is the spot where they abducted me," shivered Dora, as they came to the old boathouse. "Oh, what a dreadful time that was, to be sure!"

"I don't believe our enemies will bother you any more, Dora," said Dick. "It's not likely that old Crabtree Will try the same game twice; and Mumps has really turned over a new leaf and gone to work for a living."

"Yes, I was glad to hear that, for I don't believe he was such a bad fellow at heart. He was under Dan Baxter's influence, just as—as—"

"As Josiah Crabtree tried to influence your mother," whispered Dick, and Dora nodded slowly. "Well, let us forget it, and—My gracious!"

Dick stopped short, to stare in open-mouthed wonder at a small boat shooting down the lake at a distance of several hundred yards from the shore.

"What's up?" came simultaneously from Tom and Sam.

"Don't you see that fellow in the boat?" demanded Dick, in increased wonder.

"Of course we see him," answered Tom.

"Don't you recognize him?"

"No; he's too far off," came from Sam..

"It's Dan Baxter!"

"Baxter!" cried Dora. "Oh, Dick!"

"Nonsense!" said Tom. "How could he be am here?"

"It does look a little like Baxter," was Sam's slow comment. "Yet it seems impossible that he could be here, as Tom says."

"I say it's Baxter," affirmed Dick stoutly, "I'll hail him and make sure."

"Oh, don't bring him over here!" interposed Dora, becoming alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed—he shan't hurt anybody, Dora." Dick raised his voice. "Hi there, Baxter! What are you doing here?"

At first there was no reply, and the boy in the rowboat kept on pulling. But as Dick repeated his call, the rower threw up his oars.

"You mind your own business," he growled. "Guess I can row on the lake if I want to."

"It is Baxter, sure enough!" ejaculated Tom.

"The rascal! We ought to recapture him."

"That's the talk," added Sam. "I wish my wrist wasn't so sore—I'd go after him."

"There's a boat below here," said Dick.

"Let's put out in that."

"He may—may shoot at you," faltered Dora. "You know how wicked he can be at times."

"Indeed I do know," answered Dick. "But he ought to be handed over to the authorities. It is a crime to let him go free."

"Hi, Baxter. Come over here; we want to talk to you!" yelled Tom.

"Not much!" growled the former bully of Putnam Hall.

"You had better come," said Sam. "If you don't come we'll bring you."

"Hush, Sam, or you'll make a mess of things!" cried Dick softly, but the warning came too late.

"Will you bring me back?" roared the bully. "Just try it on and see how I'll fix you."

"Come on for the boat," said Tom. "We'll show him he can't scare us."

He started off and Dick came after him. Sam was also about to follow, when his elder brother stopped him.

"You can't do much with that sore wrist, Sam," he said. "Better stay with the girls until we come back. You can watch events from the shore, and run for assistance, if it's necessary."

Sam demurred at first, but soon saw the wisdom of Dick's reasoning and consented to remain behind.

By this time Tom had shoved out the rowboat Dick had mentioned—a neat craft belonging to a farmer living near. A pair of oars lay in a locker on the lake bank; and, securing these, Tom leaped on board of the craft, and soon Dick came after.

Dan Baxter had watched their movement with interest, which speedily gave way to arm when he saw the other boat come out, and beheld Dick and Tom each take up an oar and begin to pull for all they could.

"I was a clam to come up here, when there is no real need for it," he muttered. "Two to one, eh? Well, I reckon I can put up a pretty stiff fight

if it comes to the worst." Then he caught up his oars once more, and began to row down Cayuga Lake with all possible speed.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE ON THE LAKE

"He means to give us as much of a chase as possible," remarked Tom, as he glanced over his shoulder. "If I remember rightly, Baxter was always a pretty fair oarsman."

"Yes, that was the one thing he could do well," returned Dick. "But we ought to be able to catch him, Tom."

"We could if we had two pairs of oars. One pair can do just about so much and no more."

"Nonsense! Now, both together, and put all your muscle into it," and Dick set a stiff stroke that his brother followed with difficulty.

Baxter had been rowing down the lake, but as soon as he saw that he was being pursued he changed his course for the east shore. He was settled to his work, and for several minutes it was hard to tell whether he was holding his own or losing.

"Hurrah! we are catching up!" cried Dick, after pulling for five minutes. "Keep at it, Tom, and we'll have him before he is half over."

"Gosh, but it's hot work!" came with a pant from Tom Rover. "He must be almost exhausted to row like that."

"He knows what he has at stake. He sees the prison cell staring him in the face again. You'd do your best, too, if you were in his place."

"I'm doing my best now, Dick. On we go!" and Tom renewed his exertions. Dick set a faster stroke than ever, having caught his second wind, and the rowboat flew over the calm surface of the lake like a thing of life.

"Keep off!" The cry came from Baxter, while he was still a hundred yards from the eastern shore. "Keep off, or it will be the worse for you!"

"We are not afraid of you, Baxter, and you ought to know it by this time," answered Dick. "You may as well give in now as later on."

"Give in! You must be crazy!"

"We are two to one, and you know what we have been able to do in the past."

"Humph! I don't intend to go to jug again, and that is all there is to it."

"Maybe you can't help yourself."

"We'll see about that. Are you—going to keep off or not?

"Don't ask foolish a question."

"You won't keep off?"

"No."

"If you don't I—I'll shoot you."

As Dan Baxter spoke he stopped rowing and brought from a hip pocket a highly polished nickel-plated revolver.

"Do you see this?" he demanded, as he pointed the weapon toward the Rover boys.

Both Dick and Tom were taken aback at the sight of the weapon. But they had seen such arms before, and had faced them, consequently they were not as greatly alarmed as they right otherwise have been. They knew, too, that Dan Baxter was a notoriously bad shot.

"Put that up, Baxter," said Dick calmly. "It may only get you into deeper trouble."

"I don't care!" said the bully recklessly. "I'm not going back to jail and that is all there, is to it!"

"You won't dare to shoot at us, and you know it," put in Tom, as the two boats drifted closer together.

"I will, and don't you fool yourself on it."

"Drop those oars or I'll fire, as sure as my name is Dan Baxter," and the revolver, which had been partly lowered, was raised a second time.

It must be confessed that Dick and Tom were much disconcerted. The two rowboats were now less than fifty feet apart, and any kind of a shot

from the weapon was likely to prove more or less dangerous. Baxter's eyes gleamed with the hatred of an angry snake ready to strike.

"You think you are smart, you Rover boys," said the bully, after an awkward pause all around. "You think you did a big thing in rescuing Dora Stanhope and in putting me and my father and Buddy Girk in prison. But let me tell you that this game hasn't come to an end yet, and some day we intend to square accounts."

"There is no use in wasting breath in this fashion, Baxter," returned Dick, as calmly as he could. "We are two to one, and the best thing to do is for you to submit. If you fire on us, we may do a little shooting on our own account."

"Humph! Do you imagine you can scare me in that fashion? You haven't any pistol, and I know it. If you had you would have drawn the weapon long ago."

At this Dick bit his lip. "Don't be too sure," he said steadily, as the boats drifted still closer together. "The minute I heard you had escaped from jail I went and bought a pistol in Cedarville." This was the strict truth, but Dick did not add that the weapon lay at that moment safe in the bottom of his trunk at the Hall.

"Got afraid I'd come around, eh?"

"I knew there was nothing like becoming prepared. Now will you—"

Dick did not have time to finish, for, lowering the front end of the pistol, Dan Baxter pulled the trigger twice and two reports rang out in quick succession. One bullet buried itself in the seat beside Tom, while the second plowed its way through the bottom, near the stern.

"You villain!" cried Dick, and in his excitement hurled his oar at Dan Baxter, hitting the fellow across the fact with such force that the bully's nose began to bleed. The shock made Baxter lose his hold on the pistol and it went over the side of his craft and sank immediately to the bottom of the lake.

"My, but that was a close shave!" muttered Tom, as he gazed at the hole through the seat. "A little closer and I would have got it in the stomach."

A yell now came from Sam, and a shriek from the girls, all of whom had heard the pistol shots. They were too far away to see the result of the shooting and feared both Tom and Dick had been killed or wounded.

As quickly as he could recover from the blow of the oar, Dan Baxter picked up his own blades, and without paying attention to the blood which was flowing from his nose, began once again to pull for the shore.

"Come on, his pistol is gone!" shouted Dick, and then his face fell. "Confound it, I've thrown away my oar! There it goes!" And he pointed some distance to their left.

"That isn't the worst of it!" groaned Tom. "Look at that hole in the bottom, made by that pistol shot. The water is coming in just as fast as it can."

There was small need to call attention to it, for the water in the bottom of the boat was already an inch deep. Dick started in perplexity, then, struck by a sudden idea, drew a lead pencil from his pocket and rammed it into the opening. It fitted very well, and the water ceased, to come in.

"Now we'll have to bail out and pick up that other oar," said Tom. "It was foolish to throw it away, Dick."

"I don't know about that. It deprived Baxter of his pistol. Paddle over, and I'll pick it up." Tom did so, and the blade was speedily recovered.

But Dan Baxter had made good use of the precious moments lost by the Rover boys, and hardly were the latter into shape for rowing once more than they saw the bully beach his craft and leap out on the shore. "Good-by to you!" he cried mockingly. "I told you that you couldn't catch me. The next time we meet I'll make you sorry that you ever followed me," and he started to run off with all possible speed.

Tom and Dick were too chagrined to answer him, and pulled forward to the shore in silence. They ran the craft into some bushes and tied up, and then started after Baxter, who was now making for the woods south of the village of Nelson.

When the highway skirting this portion of Cayuga Lake was gained Dan Baxter was a good five hundred feet ahead of them. A turn in the road soon hid him from view. Gaining the bend they discovered that he had disappeared from view altogether.

"He has taken to the woods," sighed Dick.

"If that is so we may as well give the hunt up," answered his brother. "It would be worse than looking for a pin in a haystack, for we wouldn't know what direction he had taken."

"I wish I had a bloodhound with which to trail him. He ought to be run down, Tom."

"Well, let us notify some of the people living near and see what can be done."

They ran on to the spot where they supposed Baxter had left the highway. On both sides were dense thickets of cedars with heavy underbrush. All in all, the locality formed an ideal hiding place.

Night was coming on by the time they gained the nearest farmhouse. Here they found three men, to whom they explained the situation.
All of the men smiled grimly.

"If he went into the woods it would be a hard job to trail him," was the comment from Farmer Mason. "If he ain't careful he'll lose himself so completely he'll never git out, b'gosh!"

"Well, I don't know but what that would suit me," responded Tom dryly.

The search was begun, and several others joined in. It lasted until night was fairly upon the party and was then given up in disgust.

"It's no use," said Dick. "He has slipped us!"

"But we ought to notify the authorities," said Tom. "They will probably put a detective on his track."

"Yes; but a detective can't do any more than we can, up in this wild locality."

"He won't remain in the woods forever. He'll starve to death."

"Well, we can send the police a telegram from Cedarville."

This was done, and the Rover boys returned to Putnam Hall by way of the side road leaving past the homes of the Stanhopes and the Lanings. They found Sam and the girls very anxious concerning their welfare.

"We were afraid you had been shot," said Dora. "I am thankful that you escaped."

"So am I," put in Sam. "But it's too bad that Baxter got away. I wonder where he will turn up next."

They all wondered, but could not even venture an answer. Soon the boys left the girls and hurried to the academy, where their story, had to be told over again. Captain Putnam looked exceedingly grave over the narrative.

"You must be careful in the future, lads," he said. "Remember, you are in my care here. I do not know what your uncle would say if anything should happen to you."

"We will be on our guard in the future," answered Dick. "But I am awfully sorry we didn't catch him."

"So am I. But perhaps the authorities will have better luck," and there the talk came to an end, and the boys retired for the night.

CHAPTER V

FUN AND AN EXPLOSION

Several days slipped by, and the boys waited anxiously for some news from the authorities. But none came, and they rightfully surmised that, for the time being, Dan Baxter had made good his escape.

On account of the disastrous ending to the kite-flying match, many had supposed that the feast in Dormitory No. 6 was not to come off, but Sam, Tom, Frank, and several others got their heads together and prepared for a "layout" for the following Wednesday, which would be Dick's birthday.

"We'll give him a surprise," said Sam, and so it was agreed. Passing around the hat netted exactly three dollars and a quarter, and Tom, Sam, and Fred Garrison were delegated to purchase the candies, cake, and ice cream which were to constitute the spread.

"We'll do the thing up brown," said Sam.

"We must strike higher than that feast we had, last year."

"Right you are!" came from Tom, "Oh dear, do you remember how we served Mumps that night!" and he set up a roar over the remembrance of the scene.

Hans Mueller had become one of the occupants of the dormitory, and he was as much, interested as anybody in the preparations for the spread. "Dot vill pe fine!" he said. "I like to have von feast twist a veek, ha I ha!

"He's a jolly dog," said Tom to Frank.

"But, say, I've been thinking of having some fun with him before this spread comes off."

"Let me in on the ground floor," pleaded Frank, who always wok a great interest in Tom's jokes.

"I will, on one condition, Frank."

"And what is that?"

"That you loan me that masquerade suit you have in your trunk. The one you used at that New Year's dance at home."

"You mean that Indian rig?"

"Yes."

"Hullo, I reckon I smell a mouse!" laughed the senator's son. "I heard you giving Hans that yarn about us training to fight Indians."'

"Did you indeed."

"I did indeed; and I heard Hans say that he wanted nothing to do with the Indians."

"Well, he's going to have something to do with at least one Indian," grinned Tom. "What do you say I get the suit?"

"Yes; if you'll fix it so that I can see the sport."

"All of the crowd can see it, if they don't leak about it," returned the fun-loving Rover.

Tom soon had the masquerade suit in his possession and also, some face paints which Frank had saved from the New Year's dance mentioned.

Shortly afterward Tom joined the crowd in the gymnasium, where Hans Mueller was trying to do some vaulting over the bars.

"I dink I could chump dem sticks of I vos taller," the German youth was saying.

"Or the sticks were lower," replied Tom, with a wink at the crowd. "That's right, Hans, you had better learn how to jump now, and to run, too."

"The Indians have come," put in Frank.

"Indians?" repeated Hans Mueller. "Vere is da?"

"They say a band of them are in the woods around here," answered Tom. "If you go out you want to be careful or they may scalp you."

"Cracious, Rofer, ton't say dot!" cried Mueller in alarm. "Vot is dem Indians doing here annavay?"

"They came in East to hunt up some buffalo that got away. They had something like half a million in a corral, and about two thousand got away from them."

This preposterous announcement was taken by Hans Mueller in all seriousness, and he asked Tom all sorts of ridiculous questions about the savage red men, whom he supposed as wild and wily as those of generations ago.

"No, I ton't vonts to meet any of dem," he said at last. "Da vos von pad lot alretty!"

"That's right, Hans, you give them a wide berth," said Tom, and walked away.

Later on Tom persuaded Dick to ask Hans if he would not walk down to Cedarville for him, to buy him a baseball. Eager to be accommodating, the German youth received the necessary permission to leave the academy acres and hurried off at the full speed of his sturdy legs.

"Now for some fun!" cried Tom, and ran off for the Indian suit and the face paints. These he took down to the bam and set to work to transform himself into a wild-looking red man.

"You're a lively one!" grinned Peleg Snuggers, who stood watching him. "We never had such a lad as you before Master Thomas."

"Thanks, Peleg, and perhaps you'll never have one like me again—and then you'll be dreadfully sorry."

"Or glad," murmured Peleg.

"Mum's the word, old man."

"Oh, I never say nuthin, Master Thomas; you know that," returned the man-of-all-work.

A number of the other pupils had been let into the secret, and, led by Dick, they ran off to the woods lining the Cedarville road. Tom came after them, skulking along that nobody driving by might catch sight of him.

Not quite an hour later Hans Mueller was heard coming back. The German boy was humming to himself and at the same time throwing up the new ball he had purchased for Dick.

"Burra! Burra!" thundered out Tom, as he leaped from behind a big tree. "Dutcha boy heap big scalp-me take um! Burra!" And he danced up to Hans, flourishing a big tin knife as he did so. The masquerade was a perfect one, and he looked like an Indian who had just stepped forth from some Wild West show.

"Ach du!" screamed Hans, as he stopped short and grew white. "It's dem Indians come to take mine hair! Oh, please, Mister Indian, ton't vos touch me!"

"Dutcha boy heap nice hair," continued Tom, drawing nearer. "Maka nice door-mat for Big Wolf. Burra!"

"No, no; ton't vos touch mine hair-it vos all der hair I vos got!" howled Hans. "Please, Mister Indian mans, let me go!" And then he started to back away.

"White bay stop or Big Wolf shoot!" bellowed Tom, drawing forth a rusty pistol he had picked up in the barn. This rusty pistol had done lots of duty at fun-making before.

"No, no; ton't shoot!" screamed Hans. Then he fell on his knees in despair.

Tom could scarcely keep from laughing at the sight, and a snicker or two could be heard coming from where Frank, Dick, and the others were concealed behind the bushes. But the German youth was too terrorized to notice anything but that awful red man before him, with his hideous war-paint of blue and yellow.

"Dutcha boy dance for Big Wolf," went on Tom. "Dance! Dance or Big Wolf shoot!" And the fun-loving Rover set the pace in a mad, caper that would have done credit to a Zulu.

"I can't vos dance!" faltered Hans, and then, thinking he might appease the wrath of his unexpected enemy he began to caper about in a clumsy fashion which was comical in the extreme.

"Hoopla! keep it up!" roared Tom. "Dutcha boy take the cake for flingin' hees boots. Faster, faster, or Big Wolf shoot, bang!"

"No, no; I vos dance so hard as I can!" panted Hans, and renewed his exertions until Tom could keep in no longer, and set up such a laugh as

had not been heard around the Hall for many a day. It is needless to add that the other boys joined in, still, however, keeping out of sight.

"You're a corker, Hans!" cried Tom in his natural voice. "You ought to join the buck-and-wing dancers in a minstrel company."

"Vot—vot—?" began the German boy in bewilderment. "Ain't you no Indian?"

"To be sure I am; I'm Big Wolf, the Head Dancing Master of the Tuscaroras, Hans, dear boy. Don't you think I'm a stunner."

"You vos Tom Rofer, made up," growled Hans in sudden and deep disgust. "Vot for you vos blay me such a drick as dis, hey?"

"Just to wake you up, Hans."

"I ton't vos been asleep, not me!"

"I mean to stir up your ideas—put something new into your head."

"Mine head vos all right, Tom."

"To be sure it is."

"Den vot you say you vos put somedings new py him, hey?"

"I mean to make you sharper-put you on your mettle."

"I ton't understand," stammered the German youth hopelessly.

"That's so, and you won't in a thousand years, Hans. But you are the right sort, any way."

"I dink I blay me Indian meselluf some tay," mused Hans. "Dot vos lots of fun to make me tance, vosn't it? Vere you got dot bistol?"

"Down in the barn. Look out, or it may go off," added Tom, as he held out the weapons, thinking Hans would draw back in alarm.

Instead, however, the German boy took the pistol and of a sudden pointed it at Tom's head.

"Now you tance!" he cried abruptly. "Tance, or I vos shoot you full of holes!"

"Hi, Tom; he's got the best of you now!" cried Frank from behind the bushes.

"You can't make me dance, Hans," returned Tom. "That old rusty iron hasn't been loaded for years."

"It ton't vos no goot? No. Maybe you vos only fool me."

"Pull the trigger and see," answered Tom coolly.

He had scarcely spoken when Hans Mueller did as advised. A tremendous report followed, and when the smoke cleared away the boys in the bushes were horrified to see that the rusty pistol had been shattered into a thousand pieces and that both Tom and Hans lay on their backs in the road, their faces covered with blood.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGE FIGURE IN THE HALLWAY

At the fearful outcome of the joke Tom had been perpetrating the boys concealed in the bushes were almost struck dumb, and for several seconds nobody could speak or move.

"Oh, Heavens, Tom is killed!" burst out Dick, who was the first to find his voice. He ran forth as speedily as possible, and one after another the other cadets followed.

Tom lay as quiet as death, with his eyes closed and the blood trickling over his temple and left cheek. Quickly Dick knelt by his side and felt of his heart.

"Tom, Tom, speak to me! Tell me you are not seriously hurt!" he faltered.

But no answer came back, and Sam raced off to get some water, which he brought in a tin can he had discovered lying handy. The water was dashed over Toni's face, and presently he gave a little gasp.

"Oh my! what struck me?" he murmured, and then tried to sit up, but for the minute the effort was a failure.

"The pistol exploded," said Frank. "A piece must have hit you on the head," and he pointed at a nasty scalp wound from which the flow of blood emanated.

As well as it could be done, Frank and Dick bound up Tom's head with a handkerchief, and presently the fun-loving lad declared himself about as well as ever, "Only a bit light-headed," as he added.

In the meantime the others had given their attention to Hans, who had been struck both in the scalp and in the shoulder. It was a good quarter of an hour before the German youth came around, and then he felt so weak that the boys had to assist him back to the academy.

"Honestly, I thought the pistol was empty," said Tom, on the return to the Hall. "Why, I think I've pulled that trigger a dozen times."

"Don't mention it," said Frank with a shiver. "Why, only last week I pointed the thing at Peleg Snuggers and played at firing it. Supposing it had gone off and killed somebody?"

And he shivered again.

"Dot vos almost as pad as von Indian's schalping," put in Hans faintly. "I dink, Tom, you vos play no more such dricks, hey?"

"No, I've had enough," replied Tom very soberly. "If you had been killed or seriously hurt I would never have forgiven myself." And it may be added here that for some time after this event fun-making and Tom were strangers to each other.

At the proper time the feast which had been planned came off, and proved to be an event not readily forgotten. It was no easy matter to obtain the good things required, and the boys ran the risk of being discovered by George Strong and punished; but by midnight everything was ready, and soon eating was "in full blast," to use Sam's way of expressing it.

A few of the boys from the other dormitories had been invited, and the boys took turns in standing out in the hall on guard.

"You see," explained Tom, "Mr. Strong may come in, and I won't be able to play nightmare again, as I did last year."

"Say, but that was a prime joke," laughed Frank.

"And Mumps!" cried Larry. "I'll never forget the orange flavored with kerosene," and a general laugh followed.

Somebody had spoken of inviting Jim Caven to the feast, but no one cared particularly for the fellow, and he had been left out.

"Perhaps he'll tell on us," suggested Larry, but Frank shook his head.

"He hasn't got backbone enough to do it. He's a worse coward than Mumps was."

Soon it came time for Sam to do his turn at guarding, and stuffing a big bit of candy in his mouth, the youngest Rover stepped out into the dimly lit hallway and sat down on a low stool which one of the guards had placed there.

For ten or fifteen minutes nothing occurred to disturb Sam, and he was just beginning to think that watching was all nonsense when he saw a dark figure creeping along the wall at the extreme lower end of the hallway, where it made a turn toward the back stairs.

"Hullo, who's that?" he muttered. "It doesn't look much like Mr. Strong."

He continued to watch the figure, and now saw that it was dressed in a black suit and had what looked like a shawl over its head.

"That's queer," went on the boy. "What can that man or boy be up to?"

Presently the figure turned and entered one of the lower dormitories, closing the door gently behind it. Then it came out again and made swiftly for the rear of the upper hallway. By this time Sam was more curious than ever, and as the figure disappeared around the bend by the back stairs he followed on tiptoes.

But as what light there was came from the front, the rear was very dark, and the youth could see little or nothing. He heard a door close and the lock click, but whether or not it was upstairs or down he could not tell.

For several minutes he remained in the rear hallway, and then he went back to his post. Soon Tom came out to relieve him, and Sam re-entered the dormitory and told his story to the others.

"That's certainly odd," was Dick's comment

"Was it a man or a boy, Sam?"

"I can't say exactly. If it wasn't a man it was a pretty big boy."

"Perhaps we ought to report the matter to Captain Putnam," suggested Frank. "That person may have been around the hallways for no good purpose."

"Oh, pshaw! perhaps it was somebody who was trying to spy on us," put in Fred. "If we tell the captain we will only be exposing ourselves, and I guess you all know what that means."

"It means half-holidays cut off for a month," said Dick.

"Besser you vait und see vot comes of dis," said Hans, and after a little more talk this idea prevailed, and then the boys went in to clear up what was left of the feast. Everything was gone but a little ice-cream, and it did not take long to dispose of this.

Sam was bound to have some fun, and instead of eating his last mouthful of cream he awaited a favorable opportunity and dropped it down inside of Fred's collar.

"Great Scott!" roared Fred Garrison. "Whow!" And he began to dance around. "Oh, my backbone! That's worse than a chunk of ice! Oh, but I'll be frozen stiff!"

"Go down and sit on the kitchen stove," suggested Dick.

"Sit on the stove? I'll sit on Sam's head if I get the chance!" roared Fred, and made a rush for Sam. A scuffle ensued, which came to a sudden end as both sent a washstand over with a loud crash.

"Wow you've done it!" cried Frank. "That's noise enough to wake the dead."

"Great Caesar, stop that row!" burst out Torn, opening the door. "Do you want to bring the captain down on us at the last minute?"

"Clear up that muss, both of you," said Dick to Sam and Fred. But the latter demurred. It was Sam's fault—he started the racket.

"I won't touch it." And Fred proceeded to go to bed.

"I reckon we had best dust," said one of the boys from another dormitory.

"So you had!" burst out Tom. "I hear somebody coming already," and in a twinkle the outsiders ran for their various quarters, leaving the occupants of Dormitory No. 6 to fix up matters as best they could.

It was no easy job to straighten out the washstand, clear up the general muss, and disrobe. But the boys were on their mettle, and in less than two minutes the light was out and all were under the covers, although, to be sure, Sam had his shoes still on and Tom was entirely clothed.

"Boys, what is the row up here?" The call came from Captain Putnam himself. He was ascending the front stairs, lamp in hand, and attired in a long dressing gown.

As no one answered, he paused in the upper hallway and asked the question again. Then he looked into one dormitory after another.

"All asleep, eh? Well, see that you don't wake up again as soon as my back is turned," he went on, and soon after walked below again, a faint smile on his features. He knew that boys were bound to be more or less mischievous, no matter how strict his regulations.

"I'll tell you what, the captain's a brick!" whispered Tom, as he began to disrobe noiselessly.

"So he is," answered Frank. "You wouldn't catch old Crabtree acting that way. He'd have bad every cadet out of bed and sent half a dozen of us down to the guard-room."

"I guess the captain remembers when he was a cadet himself," remarked Dick. "I've heard that they cut up some high pranks at West Point."

"George Strong would be just as kind," came from Tom. "But say, I am growing awfully tired."

"So am I," came from several others,

Then the good-night word was passed, and soon all of the cadets were sound asleep, never dreaming of the surprise which awaited them in the morning.

CHAPTER VII

WHO WAS GUILTY?

"Boys, I've had my trunk looted!"

"And I've had my trousers' pockets picked!"

"And the half-dollar I left on the bureau is gone!"

Such were some of the excited exclamations which the Rover boys heard when they went downstairs the next morning. The speakers were the youths who occupied Dormitories Numbers 3 and 4, at the rear of the main upper hall. An inquiry among the lads elicited the information that everybody had suffered excepting one boy, who said he had not had any money on hand.

"I spent my last cent for the spread," he grinned. "I guess I'm the lucky one."

The news of the robberies created a profound sensation throughout Putnam Hall, and both Captain Putnam and George Strong were very much disturbed.

"We never had such a thing occur before," said the captain, and he ordered a strict investigation.

All told, something like thirty-two dollars were missing, and also a gold watch, a silver watch, and several shirt-studs of more or less value. Among the shirt-studs was one set with a ruby belonging to a cadet named Weeks.

The investigation revealed nothing of importance. The robbery had been committed during the night, while the owners of the money and the various articles slept.

"I must get at the bottom of this affair," said Captain Putnam. "The honor of the academy is at stake."

He talked to all of those who had lost anything and promised to make the matter good. Then he asked each if he had any suspicions regarding the thief or thieves. No one had, and for the time being it looked as if the case must fall to the ground.

Those who had been at the feast hardly knew what to say or to do. Should they tell the captain of the strange figure Sam had seen in the hallway?

"I'll tell him, and shoulder the blame, if you fellows are willing," said Sam, after a long discussion. "Fun is one thing, and shielding a thief is another."

"But what can you tell?" asked Fred. "You do not know that that person, was the thief."

"More than likely he was," came from Dick.

"And if he was, who was he?" went on Fred. "If you tell Captain Putnam you'll simply get us all into trouble."

"I vote that Sam makes a clean breast of it," said Frank, and Larry said the same. This was just before dinner, and immediately after the midday meal had been finished the youngest Rover went up to the master of the Hall and touched him on the arm.

"I would like to speak to you in private and at once, Captain Putnam," he said.

"Very well, Rover; come with me," was the reply, and Captain Putnam led the way to his private office.

"I suppose I should have spoken of this before," said Sam, when the two were seated. "But I didn't want to get the others into trouble. As it is, Captain Putnam, I want to take the entire blame on my own shoulders."

"The blame of what, Samuel?"

"Of what I am going to tell you about. We voted to tell you, but I don't want to be a tattle-tale and get the others into trouble along with me."

"I will hear what you have to say," returned the master of the Hall briefly.

"Well, sir, you know it was Dick's birthday yesterday, and we boys thought we would celebrate a bit. So we had a little blow-out in our room."

"Was that the noise I heard last night?"

"The noise you heard was from our room, yes. But that isn't what I was getting at," stammered Sam. "We set a guard out in the hallway to keep watch."

"Well?"

"I was out in the hall part of the time, and I saw a dark figure in the rear hallway prowling around in a most suspicious manner. It went into Dormitory No. 3 and then came out and disappeared toward the back stairs."

"This is interesting. Who was the party?"

"I couldn't make out."

"Was it a man or a woman?

"A man, sir, or else a big boy. He had something like a shawl over his shoulders and was dressed in black or dark-brown."

"You saw him go in and come out of one of the sleeping rooms?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then he went down the back stairs?"

"He either went down the stairs or else into one of the back rooms. I walked back after a minute or two, but I didn't see anything more of him, although I heard a door close and heard a key turn in a lock."

"Was this before I came up or after?"

"Before, sir. We went to sleep right after you came up."

"Who was present at the feast?" And now Captain Putnam prepared to write down the names.

"Oh, sir; I hope you won't—won't—"

"I'll have to ask you for the names, Samuel. I want to know who was on foot last night as well as who was robbed."

"Surely you don't think any of us was guilty?" cried Sam in sudden horror.

"I don't know what to think. The names, please."

"I—I think I'll have to refuse to give them, Captain Putnam."

"Of course all the boys who sleep in your dormitory were present?"

"I said I would take this all on my own shoulders, Captain Putnam. Of course, you know I wouldn't have confessed at all; but I don't wish to give that thief any advantage."

"Perhaps the person wasn't a thief at all, only some other cadet spying upon you."

"We thought of that."

"You may as well give me the names. I shall find them out anyway."

Hardly knowing whether or not he was doing right, Sam mentioned all of the cadets who had taken part in the feast. This list Captain Putnam compared with another containing the names of those who had been robbed.

"Thirty-two pupils," he mused. "I'll have the whole, school in this before I finish."

He looked at Sam curiously. The youth wondered what was coming next, when there was a sudden knock on the door. "Come in," said Captain Putnam, and one of the little boys entered with a letter in his hand.

"Mr. Strong sent me with this," said the young cadet. "He just found it on the desk in the main recitation room."

"All right, Powers; thank you," answered the captain, and took the letter. "You can go," and Powers retired again.

The letter was encased in a dirty, envelope on which was printed in a big hand, in lead pencil:

"CAPT. VICTOR PUTNAM.
Very Important. Deliver at Once."

Taking up a steel blade, the master of the Hall cut open the envelope and took out the slip of paper it contained. As he read the communication he started. Then he crushed the paper in his hand and looked sharply at Sam.

"Samuel, was the party you saw in the hall-way tall and slim?"

"Rather tall, yes, sir."

"And slim?"

"Well, he wasn't fat."

"Did you see his face?"

"No; it was too dark for that, and, besides, he had that shawl, or whatever it was, pretty well up around him."

"Did you notice how he walked?"

"He moved on tiptoes."

"And you cannot imagine who it was?"

"No, sir."

"By the way, you of course know Alexander Pop, our colored waiter."

"Why, to be sure! Everybody knows Aleck, and we have had lots of fun with him, at one time or another. But you surely don't suspect him, do you?"

"This letter says Pop is guilty."

"That letter? And who wrote it?"

"I do not know. It contains but two lines, and you can read it for yourself," and the captain handed over the communication, which ran as follows:

"Alexander Pop stole that money and the other things.
ONE WHO KNOWS ALL."

"That's a mighty queer letter for anybody to write," murmured Sam, as he handed it back. "Why didn't the writer come to you, as I have done?"

"Perhaps he wanted to keep out of trouble."

"I don't believe the letter tells the truth, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because Aleck is too good-hearted a fellow to turn thief."

"Hum! That hardly covers the ground, Samuel."

"Well, why don't you have him searched?"

"I will."

Without further ado Sam was dismissed, and Captain Putnam called George Strong to him and showed the strange letter.

"Why not look among Pop's effects?" suggested the assistant. "He may have hidden the money and jewelry in his trunk."

"We will go up to his apartment," replied Captain Putnam, and a few minutes later the pair ascended to the attic room which the colored

waiter had used for several terms. They found Pop just fixing up for a trip to Cedarville.

He nodded pleasantly, and then looked at both questioningly.

"Pop, I am afraid I have a very unpleasant duty to perform," began Captain Putnam.

"Wot's dat, sah?" asked Aleck in surprise.

"You have heard of the robberies that have been committed?"

"'Deed I has, sah. But—but yo' don't go fo' to distrust me, do yo', cap'n?" went on the colored man anxiously.

"I would like to search your trunk and your clothing, Pop. If you are innocent you will not object."

"But, sah, I didn't steal nuffin, sah."

"Then you shouldn't object."

"It aint right nohow to 'spect an honest colored pusson, sah," said Aleck, growing angry.

"Do you object to the search?"

"I do, sah. I am not guilty, sah, an' dis am not treatin' me jest right, sah, 'deed it aint, sah."

"If you object, Pop, I will be under the painful necessity of having Snuggers place you under arrest. You know he is a special officer for the Hall."

At this announcement Aleck fell back completely dumfounded. "Well, dat's de wust yet!" he muttered, and sank back on a chair, not knowing what to do next.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH ALEXANDER POP RUNS AWAY

"Will you submit to having your trunk examined or not?" demanded Captain Putnam, after a painful pause, during which Alexander Pop's eyes rolled wildly from one teacher to the other.

"Yo' kin examine it if yo' desire," said Aleck. "But it's an outrage, Cap'n Putnam, an' outrage, sah!"

Without more ado Captain Putnam approached the waiter's trunk, to find it locked.

"Where is the key, Pop?"

"Dare, sah, on de nail alongside ob yo' sah."

Soon the trunk was unlocked and the lid thrown back. The box contained a miscellaneous collection of wearing apparel, which the captain pushed to one side. Then he brought out a cigar box containing some cheap jewelry and other odds and ends, as well as two five dollar bills.

"Dat money am mine, sah," said Aleck. "Yo paid me dat las' Saturday, sall."

"That is true, but how did this get here, Pop?"

As Captain Putnam paused he held up a stud set with a ruby-the very stud the cadet Weeks had lost!

"Dat—dat stud—I never seen dat shirt-stud before, cap'n, 'deed I didn't," stammered the waiter.

"That is certainly Weeks' stud; I remember it well," put in George Strong. "He showed it to me one day, stating it was a gift from his aunt."

"And here is a cheap watch," added Captain Putnam, bringing forth the article. "Pop, is this your watch?"

"No, sah—I—I never seen dat watch before," answered Aleck nervously. "I dun reckon sumbuddy put up a job on dis poah coon, sah," he continued ruefully.

"I believe the job was put up by yourself," answered Captain Putnam sternly. "If you are guilty you had better confess."

A stormy war of words followed. Alexander Pop stoutly declared himself innocent, but in the face of the proofs discovered the master of the Hall would not listen to him.

"Peleg Snuggers shall take you in charge and drive down to the Cedarville lock-up," said the captain.

The news that some of the things had been found in Pop's trunk spread with great rapidity. Many were astonished to learn that he was thought guilty, but a few declared that "a coon wasn't to be trusted anyway."

"Niggers are all thieves," said Jim Caven, "never yet saw an honest one."

"I don't believe you!" burst out Tom. "Pop's a first-rate fellow, and the captain has got to have more proof against him before I'll believe him guilty."

"Oh, he's a bad egg!" growled the Irish boy.

"You only say that because he called you down last week," put in Frank. He referred to a tilt between the new pupil and the colored man. Jim Caven had tried to be "smart" and had gotten the worst of the encounter.

"Yes, I think he's as honest as you are!" burst out Tom, before he had stopped to think twice.

"What! do you call me a thief!" roared Jim Caven, and leaped upon Tom, with his face as white as the wall. "I'll make you smart for that!"

One blow landed on Tom's cheek and another was about to follow, when Tom dodged and came up under Caven's left arm. Then the two boys faced each other angrily.

"A fight! Fight!" cried a number of the cadets, and in a twinkle a ring was formed around the two contestants.

"I'm going to give you the worst thrashing you ever had," said Caven, but in rather a nervous tone.

"All right, Caven, go ahead and do it," cried Tom. "I will stand up for Aleck Pop, and there you are!"

Tom launched forth and caught Caven on the right cheek. The Irish lad also struck out, but the blow fell short. Then the two boys clinched.

"Break away there!" cried Frank. "Break away!"

"I'll break his head!" panted Caven. "How do you like that?" And he held Tom with one hand and hit him in the neck with the other.

The blow was a telling one, and for a brief instant Tom was dazed. But then he caught his second wind and threw Caven backward. Before the Irish lad could recover his balance, Tom struck him in the nose, and over rolled his opponent.

A shout went up. "Good for Tom Rover! That was a telling blow! I Keep it up!"

"I'll fix you!" gasped Jim Caven, as soon as he could speak. "I'll fix you!" and staggering to his feet, he glanced around for some weapon. Nothing met his view but a garden spade which Peleg Snuggers had been using, and catching this up he ran for Tom as if to lay him low forever.

"Caven, none of that! Fight fair!"

"He shan't call me a thief!" growled the Irish boy. "I'll show him!" And he aimed a tremendous blow for Tom's head.

Had the spade fallen as intended Tom's cranium might have been split in twain. But now both Dick and Frank caught the unreasonable youth and held him while Sam and several others took the spade away.

"Stop it—here comes Mr. Strong!" came the unexpected cry from some outsiders.

"Yes, give it up, Tom," whispered Sam.

"We're in hot water enough, on account of that feast."

"I'll give it up if Caven is willing," muttered

"I'll meet you another time," answered Caven, and walked rapidly away.

"What is the row here?" demanded George Strong, as he strode up.

"Nothing, sir," said one of the boy. "Some of the fellows were wrestling for possession of that spade."

"Oh, I was afraid there was a fight," and Mr. Strong sauntered off.

He was on his way to the barn, and presently the cadets saw him come forth with the man-of-fall-work and the light spring wagon.

"They are going to take poor Aleck to the Cedarville lock-up," announced Fred. "Poor chap, I never thought this of him!"

"Nor I," answered Dick. "To me this affair isn't very clear."

"I don't believe they will be able to convict him of the crime," put in Sam.

An hour later Peleg Snuggers started away from Putnam Hall with his prisoner. Aleck looked the picture of misery as he sat on a rear seat, his wrists bound together and one leg tied to the wagon seat with a rope.

"Dis am a mistake," he groaned. "I aint guilty nohow!"

Some of the boys wished to speak to him, but this was not permitted. Soon the turnout was out of sight.

"You may think I am hard with him," said Captain Putnam, later on, "but to tell the truth he does not come from a very good family and he has a step-brother already in prison."

"Aleck can't be held responsible for his stepbrother's doings," murmured Tom, but not loud enough for the master to hear him.

A diligent search had been made for the other stolen articles, but nothing more was brought to light. If Pop had taken the things he had either hidden them well or else disposed of them.

It was nearly nightfall when Peleg Snuggers drove back to the Hall. Dick and Tom met him just outside the gates and saw that the man-of-all-work looked much dejected.

"Well, Peleg, is he safe in jail?" called out Tom.

"No, he ain't," was the snappy reply.

"Why, what did you do with him?" questioned Dick quickly.

"Do? I didn't do nuthin—not me. It was him as did it all—cut that blessed rope and shoved me over the dashboard on to the hosses!" growled Snuggers.

"Do you mean to say he got away from you?" asked Tom.

"Yes, he did—got away like a streak o' fightnin', thet's wot he did, consarn him!" And without another word Peleg drove to the rear of the Hall, put his team in the barn, and went in to report to Captain Putnam.

Another row resulted, and this nearly cost the utility Man his position. But it appeared that he was not so much to blame that Alexander Pop had taken him unawares and finally he was sent away to his work with the caution to be more careful in the future. Before night and during the next day a hunt was made for the colored man, but he had left the vicinity entirely, gone to New York, and shipped on one of the outward-bound ocean vessels. The Rover boys fancied that they would never see him again, but in this they were mistaken.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROVER BOYS ON WHEELS

"Say, fellows, but this is the greatest sport yet!"

"I feel like flying, Tom," said Dick Rover. "I never thought wheeling was so grand."

"Nor I," came from Sam Rover. "Where shall we go this afternoon?"

It was several weeks later, and the scholars were having a half-holiday. Just six days before, Randolph Rover had surprised his three nephews by sending each a handsome bicycle, and it had taken them hardly any time to learn how to handle the machines.

"Let us take a ride over to Chardale," said Dick. "I understand that the roads are very good in that direction."

"All right, I'm willing," answered Sam, and Tom said the same. Soon the three brothers were on the way, Dick leading and Tom and Sam coming behind, side by side.

It was an ideal day for cycling, cool and clear, and the road they had elected to take was inviting to the last degree, with its broad curves, its beautiful trees, and the mountainous views far to the north and west.

"It's a wonder we didn't get wheels before," observed Dick. "This beats skating or riding a to bits."

"Just you look out that you don't take a header!" warned Tom. "This road is all right, but a loose stone might do a pile of damage."

"I've got my eye on the road," answered his big brother. "For the matter of that, we'll all have to keep our eyes open."

To reach Chardale they had to cross several bridges and then descend a long hill, at the foot of which ran the railroad to several towns north and south.

"Come on!" cried Tom, and spurted ahead. With a laugh, Sam tried to catch up to him, but could not. "Now for a coast!" went on the fun-loving Rover, as the hill was gained, and on he started, his wheel flying faster and faster as yard after yard was covered.

"My gracious, Tom! look out or you'll be smashed up!" yelled Dick. "Put on your brake!"

"Can't," came back the answer. "I took it off entirely this morning."

This reply had scarcely reached Dick's ears when another sound came to him which disturbed him greatly.

Far away he heard the whistle of a locomotive as it came around the bottom of the hill. Looking in the direction, he saw the puff of smoke over the treetops.

He tried to cry out, but now the road was rather rough, and he had to pay strict attention 'to where he was riding.

"Tom's going to get into trouble," gasped Sam, as he ranged up alongside of his elder brother. "The road crosses the railroad tracks just below here."

"I know it, Sam. I wish we could make him come back."

As Dick finished he saw a chance to stop and at once dismounted. Then he yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Tom, stop! Stop, or you'll run into the railroad train!"

Sam also came to a halt and set up a shout. But Tom was now speeding along like the wind and did not hear them.

Nearer and nearer he shot to the railroad tracks. Then the whistle of the locomotive broke upon his ears and he turned pale.

"I don't want to run into that train," he muttered, and tried to bring his bicycle to a halt.

But the movement did not avail without a brake, and so he was compelled to seek for some side path into which he might guide his machine.

But, alas! the road was hemmed in with a heavy woods on one side and a field of rocks on the other. A sudden stop, therefore, would mean a bad spill, and Tom had no desire to break his bones by any such proceeding.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the railroad crossing. He could now hear the puffing of the engine quite plainly and caught a glimpse of the long train over the rocks to his left. On he bounded until the crossing itself came into view. He was less than a hundred yards from it—and the oncoming engine was about the same distance away!

There are some moments in one's life that seem hours, and the present fraction of time was of that sort to poor Tom. He had a vision of a terrific smash-up, and of Dick and Sam picking up his lifeless remains from the railroad tracks. "I'm a goner!" he muttered, and then, just before the tracks were reached, he made one wild, desperate leap in the direction of a number of bushes skirting the woods. He turned over and over, hit hard —and for several seconds knew no more.

When Dick and Sam came up they found Tom sitting in the very midst of the bushes. The bicycle lay among the rocks with the handle-bars and the spokes of the front wheel badly twisted.

"Are you much hurt, Tom?" asked his big brother sympathetically, yet glad to learn that Tom had not been ground to death under the train, which had now passed the crossing.

"I don't know if I'm hurt or not," was the 'slow answer, as Tom held his handkerchief to his nose, which was bleeding.

"I tried to plow up these bushes with my head, that's all. I guess my ankle is sprained, too."

"You can't ride that wheel any further," announced Sam.

"I don't want to ride. I've had enough, for a few days at least."

It was a good quarter of an hour before Tom felt like standing up. Then he found his ankle pained him so much that walking was out of the question.

"I'm sure I don't know what I am going to do," he said ruefully. "I can't walk and I can't ride, and I don't know as I can stay here."

"Perhaps Dick and I can carry you to Hopeton," said Sam, mentioning a small town just beyond the railroad tracks.

"It will be a big job. If you— Here comes a wagon. Perhaps the driver of that will give me a lift."

As Tom finished a large farm wagon rattled into sight, drawn by a pair of bony horses and driven by a tall, lank farmer.

"Hullo, wot's the matter?" asked the farmer, as he drew rein. "Had a breakdown?"

"No, I've had a smash-up," answered Tom.

"My brother's ankle is sprained, and we would like to know if you can give him a lift to the next town," put in Dick. "We'll pay you for your trouble."

"That's all right—Seth Dickerson is allers ready to aid a fellow-bein' in distress," answered the farmer. "Can ye git in the wagon alone?"

Tom could not, and the farmer and Dick carried him forward and placed him on the seat. Then the damaged bicycle was placed in the rear of the turnout, and Seth Dickerson drove off, while Sam and Dick followed on their steeds of steel.

"I see you air dressed in cadet uniforms," remarked the farmer, as the party proceeded on its way. "Be you fellers from Pornell school?"

"No; we come from Putnam Hall," answered Tom.

"Oh, yes—'bout the same thing, I take it. How is matters up to the school—larnin' a heap?"

"We are trying to learn all we have to."

"Had some trouble up thar, didn't ye? My wife's brother was a-tellin' me about it. A darkey stole some money an' watches, an' that like."

"They think he stole them," said Tom.

"We can hardly believe it."

"Why don't Captain Putnam hunt around them air pawnshops fer the watches?" went on Seth Dickerson, after a pause.

"The thief would most likely pawn 'em, to my way of thinkin'."

"He hasn't much of a chance to do that. But I presume the police will keep their eyes open."

"I was over to Auburn yesterday—had to go to see about a mortgage on our farm—and I stopped into one of them pawnbrokin' shops to buy a shot-gun, if I could git one cheap. While I was in there a big boy came in and pawned a gold watch an' two shirt studs."

"Is that so," returned Tom, with much interest. "What kind of a looking boy was it?"

"A tall, slim feller, with reddish hair. He had sech shifty eyes I couldn't help but think that maybe he had stolen them things jest to raise some spending money."

"Did he give his name?"

"He said Jack Smith, but I don't think thet vas correct, for he hesitated afore he gave it."

"A tall, slim fellow, with reddish hair and shifty eyes," mused Tom. "Do you remember how he was dressed?"

"He had on a rough suit of brownish-green and a derby hat with a hole knocked in one side."

"My gracious me!" burst out the boy. "Can it be possible!"

"Can wot be possible, lad?"

"That description fits one of our students exactly." Tom called to Dick and Sam. "Come up here, both of you!"

"What's up, Tom; do you feel worse?" asked Dick, as he wheeled as closely to the seat of the wagon as possible.

"No, I feel better. But I've made a big discovery—at least, I feel pretty certain that I have?"

"What discovery?" questioned Sam.

"I've discovered who stole that money and other stuff."

"And who was it?" came quickly from both brothers.

"Jim Caven."

CHAPTER X

A STRANGE MESSAGE FROM THE SEA

"Jim Caven!" repeated Dick slowly, "What makes you believe that he is guilty?"

"From what Mr. Dickerson here says," answered Tom, and repeated what the farmer had told him.

"Gracious, that does look black for Caven!" said Dick, when he had finished. He turned to the farmer. "Would you recognize that boy again if you saw him?"

"I allow as how I would. His eyes was wot got me—never saw sech unsteady ones afore in my life."

"Yes, those eyes put me down on Caven the minute I saw him," answered Tom. "More than half of the boys at the Hall have put him down as a first-class sneak, although we can't exactly tell why."

"See here," said Dick. "I think it would be best if Mr. Dickerson would drive back to the Hall with us and tell Captain Putnam of what he knows."

"And see if he can identify Caven," finished Sam. "Are you willing to do that, Mr. Dickerson?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I've got some business to attend to now," was the slow reply.

"I am sure Captain Putnam will pay you for your trouble," went on Sam. "If he won't, we will."

"You seem mighty anxious to bring this Caven to justice," smiled the farmer.

"We are, for two reasons," said Tom. "The first is, because he isn't the nice sort to have around, and the second is, because one of the men working at the school, a colored waiter, whom we all liked, has been suspected of this crime and had to run away to avoid arrest."

"I see. Well—" The farmer mused for a moment. "All right, I'll go back with ye—and at once."

The team was turned around as well as the narrow confines of the hilly road permitted, and soon the Rover boys were on their way back to Putnam Hall, a proceeding which pleased Tom in more ways than one, since he would not have now to put up at a strange resort to have his ankle and his wheel cared for. They bowled along at a rapid gait, the horses having more speed in them than their appearance indicated. They were just turning into the road leading to Putnam Hall grounds when Dick espied several cadets approaching, bound for the lake shore.

"Here come Caven, Willets, and several others!" he cried. "Mr. Dickerson, do you recognize any of those boys?"

The farmer gave a searching glance, which lasted until the approaching cadets were beside the wagon. Then he pointed his hand at Jim Caven.

"Thet's the boy I seed over to Auburn, a-pawning thet watch an' them studs," he announced. "He's got his sodger uniform on, but I know him jest the same."

Jim Caven looked at the farmer in astonishment. Then when he heard Seth Dickerson's words he fell back and his face grew deathly white.

"I—I don't know you," he stammered.

"I seed you over to Auburn, in a pawnshop," repeated Dickerson.

"It—It isn't true!" gasped Caven. "I was never over to Auburn in my life. Why should I go there to a pawnshop?"

"I guess you know well enough, Caven," said Tom. "You bad better come back to the Hall with us and have a talk with Captain Putnam."

"I won't go with you. This is—is a—a plot against me," stammered the slim youth.

"You will go back!" cried Dick, and caught Caven by the arm. But with a jerk the seared boy freed himself and ran down the road at the top of his speed.

Sam and Dick pursued him on their bicycles, while some of the others came after on foot. Seeing this, Jim Caven took to the woods just as Dan Baxter had done, and the boys found it impossible to track him any further.

"I wonder if he'll come back tonight?" said Dick, as the party returned to where they had left Seth Dickerson and Tom.

"I don't think he will," answered Sam. "I declare, he must be almost as bad as the Baxters!"

The farm wagon soon reached the Hall, and Dick ushered Seth Dickerson into Captain Putnam's office. The captain looked surprised at the unexpected visitor, but listened with deep concern to all the farmer and the Rover boys had to say.

"This certainly looks black for Caven," he said at last. "I did not think I had such a bad boy here. And you say he got away from you?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a question if he will come back—providing he is really guilty. I will have his trunk and bag searched without delay. But if he is guilty how did that ruby stud and the watch come into Alexander Pop's possession?"

"He was down on Aleck," replied Tom, who had hobbled in after the others. "And, besides, he thought if Aleck was arrested the search for the criminal would go no further."

"Perhaps you are right, Thomas. It is a sad state of affairs at the best."

The party ascended to the dormitory which Jim Caven occupied with several smaller boy. His trunk was found locked, but Captain Putnam took upon himself the responsibility of hunting up a key to fit the box. Once open the trunk was found to contain, among other things, a bit of heavy cloth tied with a piece of strong cord.

"Here we are, sure enough!" cried the captain, as he undid the package and brought to light several of the missing watches and also some of the jewelry. "I guess it is a clear case against Caven, and Pop is innocent."

"I wish we could tell Pop of it," put in Dick.

"He must feel awfully bad."

"I will do what I can for the negro, Rover. I am very sorry indeed, now, that I suspected him," said Captain Putnam, with a slow shake of his head.

At the bottom of the trunk was a pocketbook containing nearly all of the money which had been stolen. A footing-up revealed the fact that two watches and three gold shirt studs were still missing.

"And those were pawned in Auburn," said Sam. "Just wait and see if I am not right."

A party was organized to hunt for Caven, and the captain himself went to Auburn that very evening. The hunt for the missing boy proved unsuccessful, and it may be added here that he never turned up at Putnam Hall again nor at his home in Middletown, having run away to the West.

When Captain Putnam came back he announced that he had recovered all but one watch. The various goods and the money were distributed among their rightful owners, and it must be confessed that a big sigh of relief went up from the cadets who had suffered. The single missing timepiece was made good to the boy who had lost it, by the captain buying a similar watch for the youth.

After this several weeks passed without anything of special interest occurring outside of a stirring baseball match with a club from Ithaca, which Putnam Hall won by a score of six to three. In this game Dick made a much-needed home run, thus covering himself with glory.

"The Rovers are out of sight!" was Larry's comment. "Whatever they do they do well."

"And they hang together like links of a chain," added Fred. "The friend of one is the friend of all, and the same can be said of an enemy."

One morning a telegraph messenger from Cedarville was seen approaching the Hall, just as the boys were forming for the roll-call.

"Here's a telegram for somebody," said Sam.

"I hope it's not bad news."

"A message for Richard Rover," announced George Strong, after receiving it, and handed over the yellow envelope.

Wondering what the message could contain and who had sent it, Dick tore open the envelope and read the brief communication. As his eyes met the words his head seemed to swim around, so bewildered was he by what was written there.

"What is it, Dick?" came from Tom and Sam.

"It's from Uncle Randolph. He wants us to come home at once. He says—but read it for yourselves," and the elder Rover handed over the message, which ran as follows:

"Have just received a strange message from the sea, supposed to be written by your father. Come home at once. RANDOLPH ROVER."

"My gracious! News from father!" gasped Tom.

"Is he really alive?" burst out Sam. "Oh, I pray Heaven the news is true!"

"A strange message from the sea," repeated Dick. "I wonder what he can mean?"

"Perhaps it's a message that was picked up by some steamer," suggested Sam. "Anyway, uncle wants us to come home at once."

"He doesn't say all of us. The message is addressed to me."

"But of course he wanted all of us to come," put in Tom. "Anyway, four horses couldn't hold me back!" he continued determinedly.

"Nor me," chimed in Sam. He drew a long breath. "If we hurry up we can catch the noon boat at Cedarville for Ithaca."

"Yes, and the evening train for Oak Run," finished Tom. "Hurry up, Dick!"

Dick was willing. To tell the truth, that message had fired him as he had never been fired before. He burst into the captain's office pell-mell, with Tom and Sam on his heels, to explain the situation. Ten minutes later—and even this time seemed an age to the brothers—they were hurrying into their ordinary clothing and packing, their satchels, while Peleg Snuggers was hitching up to take them to the landing at Cedarville.

"Good-by to you, and good luck!" shouted Frank, as they clambered into the wagon, and many other cadets set up a shout. Then the wagon rattled off. The Rover boys had turned their backs on dear old Putnam Hall for a long while to come.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROVERS REACH A CONCLUSION

For the three Rover boys the Golden Star could not make the trip from Cedarville to Ithaca fast enough. They fretted over every delay, and continually wondered if there was any likelihood of their missing the train which was to take them to Oak Run, the nearest railroad station to Valley Brook farm, their uncle's home.

But the train was not missed; instead, they had to wait half an hour for it. During this time they procured dinner, although Dick felt so strange he could scarcely eat a mouthful.

"Uncle Randolph doesn't say much," he murmured to Tom. "He might have said more."

"We'll know everything before we go to bed, Dick," answered his brother. "I don't believe Uncle Randolph would telegraph unless the news was good."

They indulged in all sorts of speculation, as the train sped on its way to Oak Run. When the latter place was reached it was dark, and they found Jack Ness, the hired man, waiting for them with the carriage.

"There, I knowed it," grinned Jack. "Mr. Rover calculated that only Dick would come, but I said we'd have 'em all."

"And what is this news of my father?" questioned Dick.

"It's a message as was picked up off the coast of Africky," replied Ness. "Mr. Rover didn't explain very clearly to me. He's a good deal excited, and so is the missus."

"And so are we," remarked Sam. "Can it be that father is on his way home?"

"I calculate not, Master Sam. Leas'wise, your uncle didn't say so," concluded the hired man.

Never had the horses made better time than they did now, and yet the boys urged Ness continually to drive faster. Swift River was soon crossed—that stream where Sam had once had such a stirring adventure—and they bowled along past the Fox and other farms.

"Here we are!" shouted Dick at last.

"There is Uncle Randolph out on the porch to greet us!"

"And there is Aunt Martha!" added Sam. "I do believe they look happy, don't you, Tom?"

"They certainly don't look sad," was the noncommittal answer; and then the carriage swept up to the horse-block and the three boys alighted.

"All of you, eh?" were Randolph Rover's first words. "Well, perhaps it is just as well so."

"We simply couldn't stay behind, uncle," said Sam. "And we are dying to know what it all means."

"But you must have supper first," put in Aunt Martha, as she gave one and another a motherly kiss. "I know riding on the cars usually makes Tom tremendously hungry."

"Well eat after we have had the news," said Tom. "We're dying to know all, as Sam says."

"The news is rather perplexing, to tell the truth," said Randolph Rover, as he led the way into the library of the spacious home. "I hardly know what to make of it."

"Who brought it?" questioned Dick.

"It came by mail—a bulky letter all the way from Cape Town, Africa."

"From father?"

"No, from a Captain Townsend, who, it seems, commands the clipper ship Rosabel. He sent me one letter inclosing another. The first letter is from himself."

"And is the second letter from father?" burst out Tom.

"Yes, my boy."

"Oh, let us see it!" came in a shout from all three of the Rover boys.

"You had better read the captain's communication first," answered Randolph Rover. "Then you will be more apt to understand the other. Or shall I read it for the benefit of all?"

"Yes, yes, you read it, Uncle Randolph," was the answer.

"The letter is dated at Cape Town, and was written a little over a month ago. It is addressed to 'Randolph Rover, or to Richard, Thomas, or Samuel Rover, New York City,' and is further marked 'Highly Important-Do Not Lose or Destroy.'"

"And what is in it?" asked the impatient Tom. "Do hurry and tell us, Uncle Randolph."

And then his uncle read as follows:

"TO THE ROVER FAMILY, New York:

"I am a stranger to you, but I deem it my duty to write to you on account of something which occurred on the 12th day of April last, while my clipper ship Rosabel, bound from Boston, U. S. A., to Cape Town, Africa, was sailing along the coast of Congo but a few miles due west from the mouth of the Congo River.

"Our ship had been sent in by a heavy gale but the wind had gone down, and we were doing more drifting than sailing to the southward when the lookout espied a man on a small raft which was drifting toward us.

"On coming closer, we discovered that the man was white and that he looked half starved. We put out a boat and rescued the poor creature but he had suffered so much from spear wounds and starvation that, on being taken on board of our ship, he immediately relapsed into insensibility, and out of this we failed to arouse him. He died at sundown, and we failed, even to learn him name or home address.

"On searching the dead man's pockets we came across the enclosed letter, addressed to you, and much soiled from water. As you will see, it is dated more than a year back and was evidently in the possession of the man who died for some time. Probably he started out to deliver it, or to reach some point from which it could be mailed.

"I trust that the message becomes the means of rescuing the Anderson Rover mentioned in the letter, and I will be pleased to learn if this letter of mine is received. The Rosabel sails from Cape Town to Brazil as soon as her cargo can be discharged and another taken on.

"Very truly yours,

"JOHN V. TOWNSEND, Captain."

As Randolph Rover ceased reading there was a brief silence, broken by Tom.

"So the man who died held a letter. And what is in that, Uncle Randolph?"

"I will read it to you, boys, although that is a difficult matter, for the writing is uneven and much blurred. On one part of the sheet there is a blot of blood—the blood, I presume—of the poor fellow who was trying to deliver the communication."

Unfolding the stained document, Randolph Rover bent closer to the table lamp that he might read the more easily. As for the boys, they fairly held their breaths, that no spoken word might escape them.

"The letter is addressed to me," said the uncle. "But the envelope is, as you can see, very much torn. I will read," and he did so.

"NIWILI CAMP, on the Congo,

"July the 18th, 189—.

"**DEAR BROTHER RANDOLPH:**

"If, by the goodness of God, this reaches you, I trust that you will set out without delay to my assistance.

"I write under great difficulties, as a prisoner, of the Bumwo tribe of natives, ruled by King Susko.

"I have discovered the secret of a gold mine here, and the king will not let me go, fearing that I will tell the outside world of my discovery and bring the English or French here to slay him and his followers. They know nothing here of Americans.

"I entrust this to the care of an English sailor who is going to try to make his escape. I cannot go myself, having had my leg broken by a blow from one of my jailers.

"I am sick and weak in body, and it may be that I will soon die. Yet I beg of you to do what you can for me. If I die, I trust you to be a father to my dear boys, Dick, Tom, and Sam, and ask Martha for me to be a mother to them.

"The king expects soon to remove to another camp at a place called Rhunda Konoka (the Water Well). Perhaps he will take me along, or else he may slay me.

"All those who were with me are dead excepting several natives who have joined the Burnwo tribe.

"Good-by, and do what you can until you are certain that I am dead.

"Your loving brother,

"**ANDERSON ROVER**"

When Randolph Rover ceased reading he saw that there were tears in the eyes of all of the boys, and that his wife was also crying. His own voice had had to be cleared continually. To all the letter was like a message from the grave.

"And that is all?" questioned Dick, breaking the silence.

"That is all, my boy—and the letter was written about a year ago!"

"But we'll go in search of him!" put in Tom, quickly. "He may be alive yet."

"I thought I would go," answered Randolph Rover, "and I thought, possibly, that I might take Dick with me."

"Oh, you must take me too!" burst out Tom. "I could never bear to be left behind."

"And you must take me," interrupted Sam. "We always go together, you know."

At this talk Randolph Rover was somewhat taken aback. "All!" he cried. "Why, what would three boys do in the heart of Africa?"

"Look for father!" cried Tom. "I shan't stay behind—you can't make me!" he went on half defiantly.

"We have been through lots of adventures, uncle, you know that," came from Sam. "We are not afraid."

"But the danger, boys—" began the uncle.

"What danger wouldn't we face for father's sake!" said Tom. "I'd go through fire and water for him."

"You had better let us all go," said Dick.

"If you don't let Tom and Sam go, why, the chances are they'll—"

"Run away and go anyway," finished Sam.

"Oh, Uncle Randolph, say we can go; please do!"

At this enthusiasm the uncle smiled sadly.

"All-right, boys; as you are bound to have it so, you shall all go. But don't blame me if the perils are greater than you anticipate, and if the undertaking costs one or more of you your lives."

CHAPTER XII.

OFF FOR AFRICA

It was long after midnight before the conversation in relation to the proposed trip to Africa came to an end. Mrs. Rover insisted that the boys should eat something, and they sat around the table discussing the viands and the two letters at the same time.

"Have you any idea where this Niwili Camp is?" asked Dick of his uncle.

"It is on the Congo, but how far froth the mouth of that stream is a question, lad. Probably we can learn all about it when we reach Boma, the capital of the Congo Free State."

"The Congo is a pretty big stream, isn't it?" questioned Sam.

"Very large indeed. At its mouth it is about ten miles wide, and it is from twelve to fourteen hundred miles long. Stanley traced its course after an expedition in which he fought over thirty battles with the natives."

"They must be fearfully savage."

"Those in the interior are. The natives that live close to the ocean are peaceable enough, so I have been told."

"And how are we going to get there?" asked Tom. "I don't suppose there are any regular steamers running to the Congo."

"No, indeed, Tom. I have written to a shipping firm in New York for information, and they will probably send word by morning," was the answer.

It can well be imagined that the boys slept but little that night. In the morning they telegraphed to Putnam Hall for their trunks, and also let Captain Putnam and their chums know how matters stood. Then began preparations for such a tour as none of them had ever before anticipated.

Word came from New York in the early afternoon mail, and the information sent was highly satisfactory to Randolph Rover. The French steamer Republique was in port, loading for Boma and other African ports, and would set sail on the coming Saturday. The firm had taken upon itself the responsibility to speak of passage for Mr. Rover and one or two others.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom. "Uncle Randolph, you had better telegraph to them at once for passage for the four of us."

"I will," answered, Mr. Rover, and the telegram was sent within the hour.

The next day was a busy one. As but little in the way of outfits could be procured in Oak Run or the adjoining villages, it was decided that they should go down to New York on Thursday afternoon and spend all of Friday in purchasing in the metropolis whatever was needed.

The only person who was really sober was Mrs. Rover, for she hated to see her husband start on such a journey, which was bound to, be full of grave perils.

"I am afraid you will never come back," she said, with tears in her eyes. "And if you and Anderson are both dead to me, what will I do?"

"Be brave, Martha," said Mr. Rover tenderly. "I feel certain that a kind Providence will watch over us and bring us all back in safety."

At last the party was ready to set off. A fond good-by was said, and away they rattled in the carryall for the railroad station at Oak Run.

"Good-by to home!" shouted Tom, as he waved his cap to his aunt, who stood beside the gateway.

"And when we come back may we bring father with us," added Dick, and Sam muttered an amen.

The journey down to New York was without incident, and as the Rovers had lived in the metropolis for years they felt thoroughly at home and knew exactly where to go for their outfit and suitable clothing for

use in such a warm country was procured, and in addition each was armed with a revolver. Mr. Rover also purchased a shot-gun and a rifle, and likewise a number of cheap gold and silver trinkets.

"The natives are becoming civilized," he explained. "But, for all that, I am certain a small gift now and then will go a long way toward making friends."

The found that the Republique was a stanch-built steamer of eight thousand tons burden. Her captain, Jules Cambion, spoke English quite fluently and soon made them feel at home. He was much interested in the story Randolph Rover had to tell concerning his missing brother.

"'Tis a strange happening, truly," he remarked. "I sincerely trust that your search for him proves successful and that he returns to the arms of his family unharmed. But it is a fierce country. I have visited it twice, and I know."

"I am glad to learn that you have been up the Congo," replied Randolph Rover. "Perhaps during your leisure hours on the trip you will not mind giving me such information as conics to your mind."

"I will tell you all I know willingly," answered Captain Cambion.

Exactly at noon on Saturday the Republique was ready to sail, and with a shout from those on the wharf who had come to see the few passengers off, she sheered away and started down the bay, past Bedloe Island and the Statue of Liberty. Before night the shore line had faded from view, and they were standing out boldly into the Atlantic Ocean.

"Off for Africa at last," murmured Sam, who had been standing at the rail watching the last speck of land as it disappeared. "What a big trip this is going to be!"

"Never mind how big it is, Sam," came from Tom, "if only it is successful."

The first few days on board were spent in settling themselves. The party had two connecting staterooms, and Mr. Rover and Sam occupied one, while Dick and Tom had settled themselves in the other.

The passengers were mostly French people, who were going to try their fortunes in French Congo. There was, however, one Englishman, a man named Mortimer Blaze, who was bound out simply for adventure.

"I'm tired of England, and tired of America too," he explained. "I've hunted through the Rocky Mountains and up in Canada, as well as at home, and now I'm going to try for a lion or a tiger in Africa."

"Perhaps the lion or tiger will try for you," smiled Tom. "What then?"

"It will be a pitched battle, that's all," drawled Mortimer Blaze. He was rather a sleepy looking man, but quick to act when the occasion demanded.

The weather was all that could be wished, and during the first week out the Republique made good progress. On a steamer there was but little for the boys to do, and they spent all of their spare time in reading the books on Africa which Captain Cambion had in his library, and which were printed in English. Often they persuaded the genial captain to tell them of his adventures in that far-away country.

"You have many strange sights before you," he said to them one day. "The strange vegetation, the immense trees, the wonderful waterfalls, some larger than your own Niagara, and then the odd people. Some of the natives are little better than dwarfs, while others are six feet and more in height and as straight as arrows.

"Did you ever hear of this King Susko?" questioned Tom.

"Yes; I have heard of him several times. He is known as the Wanderer, because he and his tribe wander from place to place, making war on the other tribes."

The captain knew nothing of Niwili Camp and expressed the opinion that it had been, like many other camps, only a temporary affair. He said that the best the party could do was to strike straight up the Congo, along the south shore, and question the different natives met concerning King Susko's present whereabouts.

On the beginning of the second week a storm was encountered which lasted for three days. At first the wind blew at a lively rate, and this was followed by thunder and lightning and a regular deluge of rain, which made all of the boys stay below. The steamer pitched from side to side and more than one wave broke over her decks.

"This is the worse storm I ever saw," remarked Dick, as he held fast to a chair in the cabin. "They won't be able to set any table for dinner today."

"Dinner!" came from Sam, with a groan.

"Who wants any dinner, when a fellow feels as if he was going to be turned inside out!" So far none of the boys had suffered from seasickness, but now poor Sam was catching it, and the youngest Rover felt thoroughly miserable.

"Never mind, the storm won't last forever," said Dick sympathetically. "Perhaps you had better lie down, Sam."

"How can I, with the ship tossing like a cork? I've got to hold on, same as the rest, and be glad, I suppose, that I am alive," and poor Sam looked utterly miserable.

It was very close in the cabin, but neither door nor port-hole could be opened for fear of the water coming in. Dinner was a farce, to use Tom's way of expressing it, for everything was cold and had to be eaten out of hand or from a tin cup. Yet what was served tasted very good to those who were hungry.

"I believe we'll go to the bottom before we are done," began Sam, when a loud shout from the deck reached the ears of all of the Rovers and made Tom and Dick leap to their feet.

"What's that?" cried Dick. "They are calling to somebody!"

Above the wind they could hear a yell from a distance, and then came more cries from the deck, followed by a bump on the side of the steamer.

"We've struck something!" ejaculated Tom.

"But I guess it wasn't hard enough to do much damage."

"That remains to be seen," answered Dick. "Storm or no storm, I'm gong on deck to learn what it means," and he hurried up the companionway.

CHAPTER XIII

A RESCUE IN MID-OCEAN

Dick found that he could remain on the deck only with the greatest of difficulty. Several life lines had been stretched around and he clung to one of these.

"What has happened?" he asked of one of the sailors. "What did we strike?"

"Struck a small boat," was the answer. "It had a colored man in it. We've just hauled the fellow on deck."

"Is he all right?"

"No; he's about half dead. But the captain thinks he may get over it, with care," and the sailor hurried away.

Dick now saw several men approaching, carrying the form of the rescued one between them. He looked at the unconscious man and gave a cry of amazement.

"Alexander Pop! What a strange happening!"

"Do you know the man?" questioned Captain Cambion.

"I know him very well," answered Dick. "He used to work at the military academy where my brothers and I were cadets." And the boy told Captain Cambion the particulars of Alexander Pop's disappearance from Putnam Hall. "I am glad that I will be able to tell him that his innocence is established," he concluded.

"All providing we are able to bring him around to himself, Master Rover," returned the captain gravely.

"You think, then, that he is in bad shape?"

"I hardly know what to think. We will take him below and do all we can for him."

It was no easy matter to transfer Pop to one of the lower staterooms, but once placed on a soft berth the Rovers did all they could for him.

"It is like a romance," said Sam, while Randolph Rover was administering some medicine to the unconscious man. "How thin he looks."

"He's been suffering from starvation," put in Dick. "I suppose he gave that yell we heard with his last breath."

All of the party watched over the colored man with tender care, and feeling that he could be in no better hands the captain left him entirely in his friends' charge. "When he comes to his senses you can let me know," he said.

Dick was watching by Pop's side, and Tom was at the foot of the berth, when the colored man opened his eyes. As they rested on first one Rover and then the other he stared in utter astonishment.

"My gracious sakes alive!" he gasped. "Am I dreamin', or am I back to Putnam Hall again?"

"Neither, Aleck," replied Dick. "You are safe on board an ocean steamer."

"An' yo'—whar yo' dun come from?"

"We are passengers on the steamer," said Tom. "You were picked up several hours ago."

"Yes, but—but I can't undersand dis nohow!" persisted the colored man, and tried to sit up, only to fall back exhausted.

"Don't try to understand it, Aleck, until you are stronger," said Dick. "Would you like some hot soup?"

"Anyt'ing, sah, anyt'ing! Why, I aint had, no reg'lar meal in most a week!" moaned the sufferer. "Glory to Heaben dat I am sabed!"

And then he said no more for quite a long, while.

The soup was already at hand, and it was Dick who fed it slowly and carefully, seeing to it that Pop should have no more than his enfeebled stomach could take care of, for overfeeding, so Mr. Rover had said, might kill the man.

The next day Pop was able to sit up, although still too weak to stand on his legs. He was continually praising Heaven for his safety.

"I dun Vink I was a goner more dan once," he said. "I was on de ocean all alone about a week, I reckon, although I lost time ob days after I'd been out two or Vree nights. I Vink I was most crazy."

"Perhaps you were, Aleck," said Sam. "But tell us how you got in that position."

"Dat am de queerest part ob it, Master Rober—de queerest part of it. I got into de small boat fo' a sleep, and de fust Ving I knowed I was miles an' miles away from eberyt'ing; yes, sah-miles an' miles away on de boundless ocean, an' not so much as a fishin' smack sail in sight. Golly, but wasn't I scared—I reckon I dun most turn white!" And Aleck rolled his eyes around impressively.

"You were in a small boat attached to some steamer?"

"Dat's it. Da had been usin' de small boat fo' surnt'ing, and left her overboard."

"Were you cut adrift?"

"I don't tink I was—but I aint shuah nohow."

"What boat was it?"

"De Harrison, from Brooklyn, bound to Cuba."

"Did you ship on her after you left Putnam Hall in such a hurry?

"I did, cos I didn't want de police to coted me. But, say, as true as I stand heah—mean sit heah—I aint guilty of stealin' dem watches an' t'ings, no I aint!"

And Aleck raised both hands earnestly. "Captain Putnam made a great mistake when he dun suspect me."

"We know it," answered Dick quietly. "We thought you innocent all along, Aleck."

"T'ank yo' fo' dat, Master Rober—I'se glad to see dat I'se got one friend—"

"Three friends, Aleck—we all stood up for you," interrupted Tom.

"T'ank yo', t'ank yo'!"

"And we discovered who the real thief was," added Sam.

"Wot, yo' dun found, dat out!" burst out Pop. "An' who was de black-hearted rascal?"

"Jim Caven."

"Dat cadet wot tried to be funny wid me an' I had to show him his place? Hol' on—I dun see him comin' from de attic one day."

"When he must have put those stolen articles in your trunk," said Tom. "Yes, he was guilty, Captain Putnam was going to have him arrested, but he got away."

Nothing would do for Alexander Pop after this but that the boys give him the full particulars of the affair, to which he listened with the closest attention. But at the conclusion his face fell.

"Ise mighty glad I am cleared," he said. "But I'd give a good deal to face de cap'n—jest to see wot he would say, eh?"

"He said he was sorry he had suspected you," said Dick.

"What a big fool dis darkey was to run away!" murmured Aleck meditatively. "I wasn't cut out fo' no sailer man. Ise been sick most ebery day since I left shoah. By de way, whar is dis ship bound?" he went on.

"To Africa."

"Africa! Shuah yo' is foolin', Massah Dick?"

"No, I am not. We and our uncle are bound for the Congo River."

"De Congo! Dat's whar my great gran' fadder dun come from—so I heard my mammy tell, years ago. I don't want to go dar, not me!"

"I don't see how you are going to help yourself, Aleck. The first stop this steamer will make will be at Boma on the Congo River."

"'Wot am I to do when I gits dar? answer me dat, chile."

"I'm sure I don't know. Perhaps the captain will let you remain on the Republique."

"What wid dern Frenchmen? I don't t'ink I could stand dat. An' what am yo' going to do in Africa?"

"We are going on a hunt for my father, who has been missing for years."

Again Aleck had to be told the particulars and again he was tremendously interested. When the boys had finished he sat in silence for several minutes.

"I've got it-jest de t'ing!" he cried suddenly.

"Got what?" asked Tom.

"De right idea, Massah Tom. Foah gen'men like yo' don't want to go to Africa widout a valet nohow. Let me be de workin' man fe de crowd. I'll take de job, cheap,—an' glad ob de chance."

"Hullo, that's an idea!" mused Dick.

"Will yo' do it, Massah Dick?"

"We'll have to speak to my uncle about it first."

"Well, yo' put in a good word fo' me. Yo know I always stood by yo' in de school," pleaded the colored man. "I don't want to be driftin' around jess nowhar, wid nuffin to do, an' no money comin' in—not but what I'll work cheap, as I dun said I would," he added hastily.

A little later Randolph Rover joined the group and Aleck's proposition was laid before him. Strange to say he accepted the colored man's offer immediately, greatly to the wonder of the boys, and from that minute on Pop be came a member of the searching party.

"I will tell you why I did it," explained Randolph Rover to the boys in private. "When we get into the jungle we will need a man we can trust and one who is used to American ways. Moreover, if there is any spying to be done among the natives the chances are that a black man can do it better than a white man."

"Uncle Randolph, you've got a long head," remarked Tom. "No doubt Aleck will prove just the fellow desired." And Tom was right, as later events proved.

CHAPTER XIV

A STRANGE MEETING IN BOMA

The storm delayed the passage of the Republique nearly a week, in a manner that was totally unexpected by the captain. The fierce waves, running mountain high, wrenched the screw and it was found next to impossible to repair the accident. Consequently the steamer had to proceed under a decreased rate of speed.

This was tantalizing to the boys, and also to Randolph Rover, for everyone wished to get ashore, to start up the Congo as early as possible. But all the chafing in the world could not help matters, and they were forced to take things as they came.

A place was found among the sailors for Aleck, and soon he began to feel like himself once more. But the sea did not suit the colored man, and he was as anxious as his masters to reach shore once more.

"It's a pity da can't build a mighty bridge over de ocean, an' run kyars," he said. "Den nobody would git seasick."

"Perhaps they'll have a bridge some day resting on boats, Aleck," answered Tom.

"But I don't expect to live to see it."

"Yo' don't know about dat, chile. Look at uddert'ings. Did yo'gran'fadder expect to ride at de rate ob sixty miles an hour? Did he expect to send a telegram to San Francisco in a couple ob minutes? Did he eber dream ob talkin' to sumboddy in Chicago froo a telephone? Did he knew anyt'ing about electric lights, or movin' pictures, or carriages

wot aint got no bosses, but run wid gasoline or sumfing like dat? I tell yo, Massah Tom, we don't know wot we is comin' to!"

"You are quite right, Alexander," said Mr. Rover, who had overheard the talk. "Science is making wonderful strides. Some day I expect to grow com and wheat, yes, potatoes and other vegetables, by electricity," and then Randolph Rover branched off into a long discourse on scientific farming that almost took away poor Aleck's breath.

"He's a most wonderful man, yo' uncle!" whispered the colored man to Sam afterward. "Fust t'ing yo' know he'll be growin' corn in de com crib already shucked!" and he laughed softly to himself.

On and on over the mighty Atlantic bounded the steamer. One day was very much like another, excepting that on Sundays there was a religious service, which nearly everybody attended. The boys had become quite attached to Mortimer Blaze and listened eagerly to the many hunting tales he had to tell.

"I wish you were going with us," said Tom to him. "I like your style, as you Englishman put it."

"Thanks, Rover, and I must say I cotton to you, as the Americans put it," laughed the hunter. "Well, perhaps we'll meet in the interior, who knows?"

"Are you going up the Congo?"

"I haven't decided yet. I am hoping to meet some friends at Boma. Otherwise I may go further down the coast."

The steamer bad now struck the equator, and as it was midsummer the weather was extremely warm, and the smell of the oozing tar, pouring from every joint, was sickening. But the weather suited Alexander Pop perfectly.

"Dis am jest right," he said. "I could sleep eall de time, 'ceptin' when de meal gong rings."

"Blood will tell," laughed Randolph Rover. "When you land, Alexander, you ought to feel perfectly at home."

"Perhaps, sah; but I dun reckon de United States am good enough for any man, sah, white or colored."

"Right you are," put in Dick. "It's the greatest country on the globe."

It was a clear day a week later when the lookout announced land dead ahead. It proved to be a point fifteen miles above the mouth of the Congo, and at once the course was altered to the southward, and they made the immense mouth of the river before nightfall.

It was a beautiful scene. Far away dashed the waves against an immense golden strand, backed up by gigantic forests of tropical growth and distant mountains veiled in a bluish mist: The river was so broad that they were scarcely aware that they were entering its mouth until the captain told them.

When night came the lights of Boma could be distinctly seen, twinkling silently over the bay of the town. They dropped anchor among a score of other vessels; and the long ocean trip became a thing of the past.

"I'm all ready to go ashore," said Tom.

"My, but won't it feel good to put foot on land again!"

"Indeed it will!" cried Dick. "The ocean is all well enough, but a fellow doesn't want too much of it."

"And yet I heard one of the French sailors say that he hated the land," put in Sam. "He hadn't set foot on shore for three years. When they reach port he always remains on deck duty until they leave again."

Mortimer Blaze went ashore at once, after bidding all of the party a hearty good-by. "Hope we meet again," he said. "And, anyway, good luck to you!"

"And good luck to you!" cried Tom. "Hope you bag all of the lions and tigers you wish," and so they parted, not to meet again for many a day.

It was decided that the Rovers should not leave the ship until morning. It can well be imagined that none of the boys slept soundly that night. All wondered what was before them, and if they should succeed or fail in their hunt.

"Dis aint much ob a town," remarked Aleck, as they landed, a little before noon, in a hot, gentle shower of rain. "Nuffin like New York."

"There is only one New York, as there is but one London," answered Randolph Rover. "Our architecture would never do for such a hot climate."

Along the river front was a long line of squatty warehouses, backed up by narrow and far from clean streets, where the places of business were huddled together, and where a good share of the trading was done on the sidewalk. The population was a very much mixed one, but of the Europeans the English and French predominated. The natives were short, fat, and exceedingly greasy appearing. Hardly a one of them could speak English.

"I don't see any Americans," remarked Dick. "I suppose—"

"There is an American store!" burst out Sam, pointing across the way. He had discovered a general trading store, the dilapidated sign of which read:

SIMON HOOK,

Dealer in Everything.
English Spoken by an American.
Horn of All Kinds Bought.
Yankee Boots Are the Best!

"He believes in advertising," laughed Dick. "I'd like to go in and see Simon Hook. Perhaps he'll remember something about father!" he added suddenly.

"That's an idea!" returned Tom. "Let us go in, Uncle Randolph."

Mr. Rover was willing, and they entered the low and dingy-looking establishment, which was filled with boxes, barrels, and bags of goods.

They found the proprietor sitting in an easy chair, his feet on a desk, and a pipe in his mouth.

"Is this Mr. Hook?" asked Randolph Rover.

"That's me," was the answer; but Mr. Hook did not offer to rise, nor indeed to even shift his position.

"We saw your sign and as we are Americans we thought we would drop in," went on Mr. Rover.

"That's right; glad to see you," came from the man in the chair; but still he did not offer to shift his position.

"Been here many years?" asked Dick.

"About twenty."

"How is business?" put in Tom, bound to say something.

"Aint none, sonny."

"You don't look very busy."

"It's a fool's place to come to, sonny. When these goods are sold I'm going to quit." Mr. Simon Hook paused long enough to take an extra whiff from his pipe. "What brought you here?"

"We are on a hunt for a missing man," answered Randolph Rover. "Did you ever meet him? His name is Anderson Rover, and he is my brother."

"Anderson Rover?" Simon Hook thought for a moment. "I remember him. He was a gold hunter from Californy, or somethin' like that."

"Yes; he was a mine owner."

"Went up the Congo four or five years ago—maybe longer?"

"Yes."

"I remember him. He had lots of money, and took several guides and a number of other, natives along."

"Have you seen or heard of him since?" questioned Dick eagerly.

Simon Hook shook his head. "No, sonny. 'Twasn't to be expected."

"And why not?" put in Tom.

"Because them as goes up the Congo never, comes back. It's a fool's trip among those wild people of the interior. Stanley went up, but look at the big party he took with him and the many fights he had to get back alive."

At this announcement the hearts of the Rover boys fell.

"You never heard one word of him?" persisted Sam.

"Nary a word, sonny. I reckon he's either lost in the jungle or among the mountains, or else the natives have taken care of him."

"Did he say anything about the trail he was going to take?" asked Randolph Rover. "I understand there are several."

"He was going to take the Rumbobo trail, most all of 'em do." Simon Hook drew a long breath. "Say, can I sell you any of these old things of mine cheap?"

"Perhaps you can," said Randolph Rover.

"We are bound for the hotel now. We will come in later."

"Glad to see you," and as they left the shopkeeper waved them a pleasant adieu with his hand. But he never stirred from his chair.

"I guess he has grown tired of trying to sell goods," observed Tom.

"Perhaps he knows that if folks want the things he has to sell they are bound to come to him," said Dick. "His store seems to be the only one of its sort around."

The hotel for which they were bound was several squares away, located in something of a park, with pretty flowers and a fountain. It was a two-story affair, with spacious verandas and large rooms, and frequented mostly by English and French people.

They had just entered the office; and Randolph Rover was writing his name in the register, when Dick caught sight of somebody in the reading room that nearly took away his breath.

"Well, I never!"

"What is it, Dick?" asked Tom quickly.

"Look at that boy reading a newspaper. It is Dan Baxter—Dan Baxter, just as sure as you are born!"

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN VILLAIRE'S LITTLE PLOT

Dick was right: the boy in the reading-room' was indeed Dan Baxter, but so changed in appearance that for the minute neither Tom nor Sam recognized him.

In the past Baxter had always been used to fine clothing, which he had taken care should be in good repair. Now his clothing was dilapidated and his shoes looked as if they were about ready to fall apart.

More than this, his face was hollow and careworn, and one eye looked as if it had suffered severe blow of some sort. Altogether he was most wretched-looking specimen of humanity, and it was a wonder that he was allowed at the hotel. But the truth of the matter was that he had told the proprietor a long tale of sufferings in the interior and of a delayed remittance from home, and the hotel keeper was keeping him solely on this account.

"How he is changed!" muttered Tom. "He looks like a regular tramp!"

"He's been in hard luck, that's certain," came from Sam. "I wonder how he drifted out here?"

While Sam was speaking Dan Baxter raised his eyes from the newspaper and glanced around. As his gaze fell upon the three Rover boys he started and the paper fell to the floor, then he got up and strode toward them.

"Dick Rover!" he cried. "Where did you fellows come from?"

"From Putnam Hall, Baxter," answered Dick quietly. "And what brought you here?"

Ordinarily Dan Baxter would have retorted that that was none of Dick's business, but now he was in thoroughly low spirits, and he answered meekly:

"I've been playing in hard luck. I went down to New York and one night when I was in a sailors' boarding house I drank more than was good for me, and when I woke up in the morning I found myself on a vessel bound for Africa."

"You were shanghaied as a sailor?" asked Tom.

"That's it, and while I was on board the Costelk the captain and mate treated me worse than a dog. See that eye? The captain did that, and when I struck back he put me in irons and fed me nothing but stale biscuits and water."

"And the ship left you here?"

"No; she was bound for Cape Town, but stopped here for supplies, and I jumped overboard at night and swam ashore, and here I am, and sorry for it," and Dan Baxter drew a long breath.

The Rovers were astonished at his meek manner. Was this really the domineering Baxter, who had always insisted on having his own way, and who had done so many wrong deeds in the past?

"You've had a hard time of it, I suppose? said Dick, hardly knowing how to go on.

"Hard, Dick, aint no word," came from the former bully of Putnam Hall. "I've run up against the worst luck that anybody could ever imagine. But I reckon you don't care about that?"

"Do you think we ought to care, Baxter?"

"Well, it aint fair to take advantage of a chap when he's down on his luck," grumbled the former bully. "I guess I've learnt my lesson all right enough."

"Do you mean to say you are going to turn over a new leaf?" queried Sam with interest.

"Yes, if I ever get the chance."

Randolph Rover now joined the group, and Dick explained the situation. Mr. Rover questioned Baxter closely and found that he was without a cent in his pocket and that the hotel keeper had threatened to

put him out if he was not able to pay up inside of the next twenty-four hours.

"See here, Baxter, you never were my friend, and you never deserved any good from me, but I don't like to see a dog suffer," said Dick. "I'll give you thirty shillings, and that will help you along a little," and he drew out his purse.

"And I'll give you the same," came from Tom.

"Ditto from me," said Sam. "But don't forget that what Dick says is true, nevertheless."

Ninety English shillings—about twenty-two dollars of our money—was more cash than Dan Baxter had seen in some time, his other money having been spent before he had taken his unexpected ocean trip, and his eyes brightened up wonderfully.

"I'll be much obliged to you for the—the loan," he stammered. "I'll pay you back some time, remember."

"Never mind about that," replied Dick.

"My advice to you is, to take the first ship you can for home."

"And what brought you out here—going on a hunt for your father?"

"Yes."

"You'll have a big job finding him. I understand the natives of the Congo are going on the warpath before long. They have had some difficulty with the settlers."

"I guess we'll manage to take care of ourselves," answered Tom, and then he and his brothers followed their uncle up to the rooms which had been engaged for them during their stay in the town.

"He's, down in the mouth, and no mistake," was Tom's comment, when the boys were left to themselves. "I never saw him so humble before."

"Perhaps knocking around has taught him a lesson," said Dick. "I hope he really does turn over a new leaf."

The day proved to be a busy one. Randolph Rover gathered all the information he could concerning the trail along the Congo, and also tried to locate Niwili Camp. He likewise purchased several additions to his outfits from Simon Hook, and engaged the services of several natives,

the leader of whom was a brawny black named Cujo, a fellow who declared that he knew every foot of the territory to be covered and who said he was certain that he could locate King Susko sooner or later.

"Him bad man," he said soberly. "No et him catch you, or you suffer big lot!" Cujo took to Aleck from the start, and the pair soon became warm friends. The African inspected their outfits with interest and offered several suggestions regarding additional purchases.

Three days were spent in Boma, and during that time the Rovers saw a good deal of Dan Baxter, who, having nothing better to do, hung around them continually. He remained as meek as before, but our friends did not know that this was merely the meekness of a savage cur while under the whip. Baxter was naturally a brute, and lacked the backbone necessary far genuine reformation.

"Say, why can't you take me with you?" he asked, on the day that the Rover expedition was to start out. "I'm willing to do my share of the work and the fighting, and I won't charge you a cent for my service."

"I don't know as my uncle wants anybody along," said Sam, to whom Baxter addressed his remarks.

"Well, won't you speak to him about it, Sam? I can't find anything to do here, and the captains to whom I've applied don't want me on their ships," pleaded the former bully of Putnam Hall.

Sam was easily touched at all times, and he knew that Baxter must feel lonely and wretched so far from home and without friends or capital. He at once went to his brothers and his uncle and laid the big youth's proposition before them.

"We don't want him," said Dick promptly.

"I don't believe he would be of any use to us."

"I would rather give him some more money just for him to stay behind," added Tom.

Mr. Rover was thoughtful for a moment.

"And what do you say, Sam?" he asked at length.

"Well, I don't like Baxter any more than the others do. But it seems awfully hard on him. I don't believe he knows how to turn."

"We might give him enough money to get back to the United States with."

"I'd rather have you do that, Uncle Randolph," said Dick. "I don't want him with me."

"I will have a talk with the misguided boy," was the conclusion reached by Randolph Rover; but he got no chance to speak to Dan Baxter until late in the afternoon, and then, to his astonishment, Baxter's manner had changed entirely, he intimating that he wanted nothing more to do with them.

For in the meantime something which was bound to be of great importance to the Rovers had occurred. In Boma were a number of persons of mixed French and native blood who were little better than the old-time brigands of Italy. They were led by a wicked wretch who went by the name of Captain Villaire. Villaire had been watching the Rovers for two days when he noticed the coldness which seemed to exist between, our friends and Baxter. At once he threw himself in Baxter's way and began to it pump the youth regarding the Americans.

"Zay are going into the interior, you have remarked," he said in very bad English. "Are zay verra rich people?"

"Yes, they are well fixed," answered the tall youth.

"And zay do carry zare money wid zem?"

"I guess not—at least, not much of it."

"You are zare friend, eh?"

"Hardly. Out in America we were enemies."

"So? You hata zem?"

"Yes, I hate them," muttered Dan, and his eyes shone wickedly. "I'm only treating them in a friendly way now because I'm out of money and must do something."

"I see. It ees a good head you have—verra good," murmured Captain Villaire. "Do you know, I heara dem talk about you?"

"Did you? What did they say?"

"De one boy say you should be in ze jail; didn't you robba somebody."

"He had better keep his mouth shut."

"You lika do somet'ing wid me?" continued the French native, closing one eye suggestively. He was a close reader of human nature and had read Baxter's character as if it was an open book.

"What do you mean?"

"We gitta dem people into trouble—maka big lot of money."

"All right—I'll do anything," answered Baxter savagely. "So they said I ought to be in jail, eh? I'll fix 'em yet!"

"You helpa me, I helpa you," went on the wily French native.

He had his plan all ready, and, after sounding Baxter some more, revealed what was in his mind, which was simply to follow the Rovers into the interior and then make them prisoners. Once this was done, they would hold the prisoners for a handsome ransom.

"That's a big job," answered the big youth. "But I like your plan, first-rate if you can carry it out."

"Trust me," replied Captain Villaire. "I have half a dozen of ze best of killowers-za, nevair fail me. But as you knowa dem you will have to do ze lettair writing for us, so zat we git ze money from zare people at home."

"Trust me for that," responded Baxter quickly. The plot pleased him immensely. "You do the capturing and I'll make Mrs. Rover or somebody else pay up handsomely, never fear."

And so a compact was formed which was to give the Rovers a good deal of trouble in the near future.

CHAPTER XVI

THE START UP THE CONGO

"It was queer Dan Baxter should act so," said Sam to his uncle, when Mr. Rover came back from his interview with the bully. "I thought he wanted to, go the worst way."

"He acted as if he had struck something else," answered Randolph Rover. "He didn't even want the money I offered. Perhaps he has received a remittance from home."

"Who would send it to him?" put in Dick. "His father is still in jail."

"Perhaps he got Mumps to send it to him," said Sam. "But I forgot, Mumps is away."

There was no time to discuss the situation further, for they were to start early on the following morning, and there were yet a dozen small matters which must be given attention. All were busy, and it was not until after eleven that evening that they turned in.

The day for the departure from Boma dawned bright and clear, and Cujo appeared with his assistants while they were still eating breakfast.

"Werry good day for um journey," he said, with a grin. "Make good many miles if nothing go wrong."

"You can't do any too well for me," answered Dick. "I hope our expedition into the interior is both short and successful."

At eight o'clock they were off. At first they had thought to go on horseback; but this was abandoned by the advice of the native, who declared that horses would prove more of a drag than a help in many places.

"Horse canno' climb tree bridge," he explained. "No climb high rock, no go around bad hill. We go on foot an' make better time."

The town was soon left behind and they struck a highway which for several miles afforded easy traveling. On all sides were dense groves of tropical growth, palms, mangoes, and the like, with enormous vines festooned from one tree to the next. Underneath were a great variety, of ferns and mosses, the homes of countless insects and small animals. The ground was black and wherever turned up gave forth a sickly odor of decayed vegetation.

"That is regular fever territory," explained Randolph Rover. "Boys, do not sleep on the ground if you can possibly avoid it. I sincerely trust that none of us take the tropical fever."

"If I feel it coming on I'll take a good dose of quinine," declared Tom.

Fortunately they had brought along a good supply of that valuable drug.

Two days traveling passed without special incident. On one side of the highway was the broad river, which glinted like molten lead in the sunshine. They could not travel very close to its bank, for here the ground was uncertain. Once Sam left the highway to get a better view of the stream, and, before Cujo noticed it, found himself up to his knees in a muck which stuck to him like so much glue.

"Hi! help me out!" roared the youngest Rover, and all of the party turned, to behold him waving his hand frantically toward them.

"He dun got stuck in de mud!" exclaimed Aleck, and started to go to Sam's assistance, when Cujo called him back.

"Must be werry careful," said the native. "Ground bad over dare—lose life if urn don't have a care. Wait fo' me." And he approached Sam by a circuitous route over the tufts of grass which grew like so many dots amid the swamp. Soon he was close enough to throw the youth the end of a rope he carried. The pull that, followed nearly took Sam's arms out by the sockets; but the boy was saved, to return to the others of the party with an experience which was destined to be very useful to him in, the future.

"It will teach me to be careful of where I am going after this," he declared. "Why, that bog looked almost as safe as the ground over here!"

"Tropical places are all full of just such treacherous swamps," returned Randolph Rover. "It will be wise for all of us to remember that we are now in a strange territory and that we must have our eyes and ears wide open."

At half-past eleven they came to a halt for dinner. The sun was now almost overhead, and they were glad enough to seek the shelter of a number of palms standing in front of a—native hostelry.

"We will rest here until two o'clock," said Mr. Rover. "It is all out of the question to travel in the heat of the day, as we did yesterday, in such a climate as this. Even the natives cannot stand that."

They found the hostelry presided over by a short, fat native who scarcely spoke a word of English. But he could speak French, and Mr. Rover spoke to him in that language, while Cujo carried on a talk in the native tongue. The midday repast was cooked over a fire built between several stones. The boys watched the cooking process with interest and were surprised to find, when it came to eating, that the food prepared tasted so good. They had antelope steak and a generous supply of native bread, and pure cocoa, which Tom declared as good as chocolate.

After the meal they took it easy in a number of grass hammocks stretched beneath the wide spreading palms surrounding the wayside inn, if such it might be called. Aleck and Cujo fell to smoking and telling each other stories, while the Rovers dozed away, lulled to sleep by the warm, gentle breeze which was blowing.

"I don't wonder the natives are lazy," remarked Dick, when his uncle aroused him. "I rarely slept in the daytime at home, and here I fell off without half trying."

"The climate is very enervating, Dick. That is why this section of the globe makes little or no progress toward civilization. Energetic men come here, with the best intention in the world of hustling, as it is termed, but soon their ambition oozes out of them like—well, like molasses out of a barrel lying on a hot dock in the sun.

"A good comparison," laughed Dick.

"Come, Tom; come, Sam!" he called out, and soon the party was on its way again.

The highway was still broad, but now it was not as even as before, and here and there they had to leap over just such a treacherous swamp as had caused Sam so much trouble. "It's a good thing we didn't bring the horses," said Mr. Rover. "I didn't think so before, but I do now."

The jungle was filled with countless birds, of all sorts, sizes, and colors. Some of these sang in a fairly tuneful fashion, but the majority uttered only sounds which were as painful to the hearing as they were tiresome.

"The sound is enough to drive a nervous fellow crazy," declared Tom. "It's a good thing nature fixed it so that a man can't grow up nervous here."

"Perhaps those outrageous cries are meant to wake a chap up," suggested Dick.

"I've a good mind to shoot some of the little pests."

"You may take a few shots later on and see what you can bring down for supper," answered his uncle. "But just now let us push on as fast as we can."

"Yes," put in Tom. "Remember we are out here to find father, not to hunt."

"As if I would ever forget that," answered Dick, with a reproachful glance.

They were now traveling a bit of a hill which took them, temporarily, out of sight of the Congo. Cujo declared this was a short route and much better to travel than the other. The way was through a forest of African teak wood, immense trees which seemed to tower to the very skies.

"They are as large as the immense trees of California of which you have all heard," remarked Randolph Rover. "It is a very useful wood, used extensively in ship building."

"After all, I think a boat on the Congo would have been better to use than shoe leather," said Sam, who was beginning to grow tired.

"No use a boat when come to falls," grinned Cujo. "Soon come to dem, too."

Aleck had been dragging behind, carrying a heavy load, to which he was unaccustomed. Now he rejoined the others with the announcement that another party was in their rear.

"They are on foot, too," he said. "Cujo whar you dun t'ink da be gwine?"

"To the next settlement, maybe," was Randolph Rover's comment, and Cujo nodded.

They waited a bit for the other party to come up, but it did not, and, after walking back, Cujo returned with the announcement that they were nowhere in sight.

"Perhaps they turned off on a side road," said Tom, and there the matter was dropped, to be brought to their notice very forcibly that night.

Evening found them at another hostelry, presided over by a Frenchman who had a giant negress for a wife. The pair were a crafty looking couple, and did not at all please the Rovers.

"Perhaps we may as well sleep with one eye open tonight," said Randolph Rover, upon retiring. "We are in a strange country, and it's good advice to consider every man an enemy until he proves himself a friend."

The hostelry was divided into half a dozen rooms, all on the ground floor. The Rovers were placed in two adjoining apartments, while the natives and Aleck were quartered in an addition of bamboo in the rear.

"Keep your eyes and ears open, Aleck," whispered Dick, on separating from the faithful colored man. "And if you find anything wrong let us know at once."

"Do you suspect anyt'ing, Massah Rober?" was Pop's anxious question.

"I do and I don't. Something in the air seems to tell me that everything is not as it should be."

"Dat Frenchman don't look like no angel, sah," and Aleck shook his head doubtfully.

"You're right, Aleck, and his wife is a terror, or else I miss my guess."

"Dat's right, Massah Rober; nebber saw sech sharp eyes. Yes, I'll look out-fo' my own sake as well as fo' de sake ob Ye and de rest," concluded Aleck.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ATTACK AT THE HOSTELRY

The night was exceptionally cool for that locality; and, utterly worn out by their tiresome journey, all of the Rovers slept more soundly than they had anticipated.

But not for long. Dick had scarcely dropped off when he heard a noise at the doorway, which was covered with a rough grass curtain.

"Who is there?" he demanded, sitting up.

"Dat's all right," came in a whisper from Aleck. "Is dat yo', Massah Dick?"

"Yes, Aleck. What brings you?"

"I dun discovered somet'ing, sah."

"What?"

"Dat udder party dun come up an' is in de woods back ob dis, house."

"In camp?"

"No; dare is a Frenchman wot is talkin' to dah chap wot runs dis shebang, sah."

"Perhaps he wants accommodations," mused Dick.

"Can't say about dat, sah. But de fellers who come up hab a lot ob ropes wid 'em."

"That's certainly queer."

"What's the row?" came sleepily from Tom, and presently Randolph Rover and Sam likewise awoke.

In a few words the colored man explained the situation. He had just finished when the wife of the proprietor of the resort came up to the doorway.

"The gentleman is wanted outside by my husband," she said in broken French.

"What does he want?" asked Mr. Rover.

"I can't say. But he says please to step out for a moment."

Mr. Rover repeated the woman's words to the boys. "What do you make of this?" he asked.

"I tell you something is wrong," declared Dick. "I have felt it all along."

"But what can be wrong, my lad?"

"If you go outside I'll go with you, Uncle Randolph."

"Well, you can do that if you wish."

The pair arose and speedily slipped on the few garments which they had taken off. Then Dick pulled out his pistol.

"Do you think it is as bad as that?" asked Sam.

"I don't know what to think. But I'm going to take uncle's advice and count every man an enemy until he proves himself a friend."

Soon Mr. Rover and Dick were ready to go out, and they did so, followed by Aleck and preceded by the native woman. As it was dark the Rovers easily concealed their weapons in the bosoms of their coats.

They walked past the bamboo addition and to the grove of trees Aleck had mentioned. There they found the Frenchman in conversation with Captain Villaire.

"You wish to see me?" demanded Randolph Rover.

"Very much," answered Villaire in French. "If You are Mr. Randolph Rover, are you not?"

"I am."

"And this is one of your nephews?"

"Yes."

"I believe you are hunting for the young man's father?" went on Villaire.

"We are. Do you know anything of him?" demanded Randolph Rover eagerly.

"I do. He sent me to you."

"He sent you!" cried Randolph Rover in amazement. "He is, then, alive?"

"Yes; but a prisoner, and very sick. He heard of your being in Boma by accident through a native of King Susko's tribe who was sent to the town for some supplies. I heard the story and I have been employed to lead you to him, and at once."

"But—but this is marvelous," stammered Randolph Rover. "I must say I do not understand it."

"It is a very queer turn of affairs, I admit. The other Mr. Rover must explain to you when you meet. He wishes you to come to him alone. It will not be safe for more."

As well as he was able Randolph Rover explained matters to Dick. In the meantime, however, the youth had been looking around sharply and had noted several forms gliding back and forth in the gloom under the trees. Dick was more suspicious than ever.

"Uncle Randolph, I don't believe this man," he said briefly. "The story he tells is too unnatural."

"I think so myself, Dick; but still—"

"Why didn't this man come straight to the house to tell us this?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Ask him."

Randolph Rover put the question to Captain Villaire. The Frenchman scowled deeply and shrugged his shoulders. "I had my reason," he said briefly. "Will you come with me?"

Before Randolph Rover could answer there came a shout from behind several trees.

"Look out fo' yourselves!" came in Aleck's voice. "Dis am a trap!"

"A trap!" repeated Dick, when of a sudden a half dozen men rushed at him and Randolph Rover and surrounded the pair. In a twinkle, before either could use his pistol, he was hurled flat and made a prisoner.

"Bind them, men," ordered Villaire sternly. "And bind them well, so that escape is impossible."

"Run for the house, Aleck!" yelled, out Dick, before those on top of him could choke him off. "Save Tom and Sam!

"I will!" came from the faithful black. And off he sped at top speed, with three or four of Captain Villaire's party after him. Cujo also went to the house, bewildered by what was going on and hardly knowing how to turn.

Randolph Rover fought desperately and so did Dick. But the two were no match for the six men who had attacked them, and ere they knew it the Rovers were close prisoners, with their hands bound behind them and each with a dirty gag of grass stuffed in his mouth.

"Now march, or you will be shot," came in bad English from one of the Villaire party. And as there seemed nothing better to do they marched, wondering why they had been attacked and where they were to be taken. Their arms had been confiscated, so further resistance was useless. When Dick lagged behind he received a cruel blow on the back which nearly sent him headlong.

A journey of several hours brought the party to a small clearing overlooking the Congo at a point where the bank was fully fifty feet above the surface of the stream. Here, in years gone by, a rough log hut had been built, which the African International Association had once used as a fort during a war with the natives. The log hut was in a state of decay, but still fit for use and almost hidden from view by the dense growth of vines which covered it.

The men who had brought Randolph Rover and Dick hither evidently knew all about the hut, for they proceeded to make themselves at home without delay. Taking the Rovers into one of the apartments of the dilapidated building they tied each to the logs of the walls, one several yards from the other.

"Now you must wait until Captain Villaire returns," said the leader of the party in French. "He will be here before daylight."

"But what does this mean?" demanded Randolph Rover.

"He will tell you what it means," grinned the brigand, and walked away to another part of the hut, which was built in a long, rambling fashion, and contained a dozen or more divisions.

"We are in a pickle," remarked Dick dismally. "This is hunting up father with a vengeance."

"We won't despair yet, Dick. But I would like to know what this means."

"It probably means robbery, for one thing, Uncle Randolph. And it may mean death." And the youth, shuddered.

"If I am not mistaken I saw some of these rascals hanging around the hotel in Boma."

"That is more than likely. They have been watching their chance to attack us ever since we left the town."

Slowly the hours wore away until morning dawned. The positions of both Dick and his uncle were most uncomfortable ones, and the youth was ready to groan aloud at the strain put upon his shoulders through having his arms tied behind him.

At last they heard footsteps approaching from the opposite end of the rambling building.

"Somebody at last!" cried Dick.

He had scarcely spoken when Captain Villaire appeared, followed by —Dan Baxter!

CHAPTER XVIII

A DEMAND OF IMPORTANCE

Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyesight as he gazed at the former bully of Putnam Hall and the Frenchman who stood beside him.

"Baxter! Is it possible!" he gasped. "What brought you here?"

"Are you a prisoner, too?" put in Randolph Rover.

"A prisoner!" laughed Baxter. "Well, that's a good one, I must say. No, I am not a prisoner."

"And what brought you here?" went on Mr. Rover.

"Can't you imagine?"

"He is in with these rascals who have captured us," came quickly from Dick. "This is how you repay our kindness, Baxter?"

"Your kindness? Bah! I want none of it. Didn't I refuse your offer, made just before you went away?"

"But you didn't refuse the first money we gave you, Baxter."

At this the bully bit his lip. "We won't talk about that, Dick Rover. Do you realize that you are absolutely in my power? How do you like it?"

"It was not you who captured us, Baxter."

"Well, it amounts to the same thing, eh, Capitan Villaire?" and the big boy turned to the French brigand, who nodded. "We collared you nicely."

"What of Sam and Tom?" asked Randolph Rover anxiously.

"Ve will not speak of zem udders," broke in Captain Villaire. "Ve vill speak apout you."

"Did Baxter put up this plot against us? queried Dick.

"To be sure I did," answered Baxter, who loved to brag just as much as ever.

"And before I let you go I'm going to make you pay up dearly for all that I have suffered. Captain Villaire, have you had them searched?" he asked, turning again to his companion.

"Yees, Baxter, but za had not mooch monish wid zem."

"How much?"

"Only about a hundred pounds."

"Then they left it behind at Binoto's place," was the quick answer. "Now if those others aren't captured—"

"Hush, ve vill not speak of zat," put in the brigand hastily.
"Tell zeni what I haf tole you."

"All right, I will." Dan Baxter turned once more to the prisoners. "Do you know why you were brought here?"

"To be robbed, I presume," answered Randolph Rover.

"Or that and worse," said Dick significantly,

"I reckon I have a right to all of your money, Dick Rover."

"I don't see how you make that out, Baxter."

"Years ago your father robbed mine out of the rights to a rich gold mine in the United States."

"That's your side of the story. I claim, and so did my father, that the mine was ours."

"It's a falsehood. The mine was discovered by my fattier, and if everything had gone right he would have had the income from it."

"This is ancient history, Baxter. Come to business. What do you intend to do with us?"

"We intend to make money out of you," was the answer, given with a rude laugh.

"In what manner?"

"First you will have to answer a few questions."

"Zat ees it," put in Captain Villaire. "How mooch morlish you bring wid you from America?"

"We didn't bring much," answered Randolph Rover, who began to smell a mouse.

"How mooch?"

"About two hundred pounds."

"Humph, a thousand dollars!" sneered Baxter. "That won't do at all."

"You must haf brought more!" cried the French brigand angrily.

"Not much more."

"You leave zat in Boma, wid ze bankers, eh?"

"Yes."

"But you haf von big lettair of credit, not so?"

"Yes, we have a letter of credit," answered Randolph Rover. "But that won't do you any good, nor the money at the banker's neither."

"Ve see about zat, monsieur. Proceed," and Captain Villaire waved his hand toward Dan Baxter.

"This is the situation in a nutshell, to come right down to business," said the former bully of Putnam Hall coolly. "You are our prisoners, and you can't get away, no matter how hard you try. Captain Villaire and his men, as well as myself, are in this affair to make money. The question is, what is your liberty worth to you?"

"So you intend to work such a game?" demanded Dick.

"That's the game, yes."

"Well, I shan't pay you a cent."

"Don't be a fool, Dick Rover. We are not to be trifled with."

"Well, I haven't any money, and that ends it. You already have all I had."

"Then you will have to foot the bill," continued Dan Baxter, turning to Randolph Rover.

"If you value your liberty you will pay us what we demand."

"And what do you demand?" questioned Mr. Rover.

"We demand twenty thousand dollars—ten thousand for the liberty of each."

This demand nearly took away Randolph Rover's breath.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" he gasped. "It is—is preposterous!"

"Is it? You are worth a good deal more than that, Mr. Rover. And I am demanding only what is fair."

"You shall never get the money."

"Won't we?"

"Never!"

"Perhaps you'll sing a different tune in a few, days—after your stomachs get empty," responded Dan Baxter, with a malicious gleam in his fishy eyes. "So you mean to starve us into acceding to your demands," said Dick. "Baxter, I always did put you down as a first-class rascal. If you keep, on, you'll be more of a one than your father."

In high rage the former bully of Putnam Hall strode forward and without warning struck the defenseless Dick a heavy blow on the cheek.

"That, for your impudence," he snarled. "You keep a civil tongue in your head. If you don't—" He finished with a shake of his fist.

"You had bettair make up your mind to pay ze monish," said Captain Villaire, after a painful pause. "It will be ze easiest way out of ze situation for you."

"Don't you pay a cent, Uncle Randolph," interrupted Dick quickly. Then Baxter hit him again, such a stinging blow that he almost lost consciousness.

"For shame!" ejaculated Mr. Rover. "He is tied up, otherwise you would never have the courage to attack him. Baxter, have you no spirit of fairness at all in your composition?"

"Don't preach—I won't listen to it!" fumed the bully. "You have got to pay that money. If you don't—well, I don't believe you'll ever reach America alive, that's all."

With these words Dan Baxter withdrew, followed by Captain Villaire.

"You think za will pay?" queried the French brigand anxiously.

"To be sure they will pay. They value their lives too much to refuse. Just wait until they have suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst, and you'll see how they change their tune."

"You are certain za have ze monish?"

"Yes; they are rich. It will only be a question of waiting for the money after they send for it."

"I vill not mind zat."

"Neither will I—if we are safe here. You don't think anybody will follow us?"

"Not unless za find ze way up from ze rivair. Za cannot come here by land, because of ze swamps," answered the Frenchman. "And ze way from ze rivair shall be well guarded from now on," he added.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT HAPPENED TO TOM AND SAM

Let us return to Tom and Sam, at the time they were left alone at Binoto's hostelry.

"I wish we had gone with Dick and Uncle Randolph," said Tom, as he slipped into his coat and shoes. "I don't like this thing at all."

"Oh, don't get scared before you are hurt, Tom!" laughed his younger brother. "These people out here may be peculiar, but—"

Sam did not finish. A loud call from the woods had reached his ears, and in alarm he too began to dress, at the same time reaching for his pistol and the money belt which Randolph Rover had left behind.

"I—I guess something is wrong," he went on, after a pause. "If we—"

"Tom! Sam! look out fo' yourselves!" came from Aleck, and in a second more the negro, burst on their view. "Come, if yo' is dressed!" he added.

"Where to?" asked Tom hurriedly.

"Anywhar, Massah Tom. De others is took prisoners! Come!" And Aleck almost dragged the boy along.

The Rover boys could readily surmise that Aleck would not act in this highly excited manner unless there was good cause for it. Consequently, as Sam said afterward, "They didn't stand on the order of their going, but just flew." Pell-mell out of the hostelry they tumbled, and ran up the highway as rapidly as their nimble limbs would permit.

They heard several men coming after them, and heard the command "Halt!" yelled after them in both French and bad English. But they did

not halt until a sudden tumble on Tom's part made the others pause in dismay.

"Oh, great Caesar!" groaned the fun-loving Rover, and tried to stand up. "I guess I've twisted my ankle."

"Can't you even walk?" asked Sam.

"We ain't got no time ter lose!" panted Aleck, who was almost winded. "If we stay here we'll be gobbled up—in no time, dat's shuah!"

"Let us try to carry Tom," said Sam, and attempted to lift his brother up. But the load made him stagger.

"De trees—let us dun hide in, de trees!" went on the negro, struck by a certain idea. "Come on, quick!"

"Yes—yes—anything!" groaned Tom, and then shut his teeth hard to keep himself from screaming with pain.

Together they carried the suffering youth away from the highway to where there was a thick jungle of trees and tropical vines. The vines, made convenient ladders by which to get up into the trees, and soon Sam and Aleck were up and pulling poor Tom after them.

"Now we must be still," said Aleck, when they were safe for the time being. "Hear dem a-conun' dis way."

The three listened and soon made out the footsteps of the approaching party. They soon passed on up the road.

"We've fooled them," whispered Sam.

"But, oh, Aleck, what does it all mean?"

"It means dat yo' uncle an' Dick am prisoners—took by a lot of rascals under a tall, Frenchman."

"Yes, but I don't understand—"

"No more do I, Massah Sam, but it war best to git out, dat's as shuah as yo' is born," added the colored man solemnly.

Poor Torn was having a wretched time of it with his ankle, which hurt as badly as ever and had begun to swell. As he steadied himself on one of the limbs of the tree Sam removed his shoe, which gave him a little relief.

From a distance came a shouting, and they made out through the trees the gleam of a torch. But soon the sounds died out and the light disappeared.

What should they do next? This was a question impossible to answer.

"One thing is certain, I can't walk just yet," said Tom. "When I put my foot down it's like a thousand needles darting through my leg."

"Let us go below and hunt up some water," said Sam; and after waiting a while longer they descended into the small brush. Aleck soon found a pool not far distant, and to this they carried Tom, and after all had had a drink, the swollen ankle was bathed, much to the sufferer's relief.

Slowly the time dragged by until morning. As soon as the sun was up Aleck announced that he was going back to the hostelry to see how the land lay.

"But don't expose yourself," said Tom. "I am certain now that is a regular robbers' resort, or worse."

Aleck was gone the best part of three hours. When he returned he was accompanied by Cujo. The latter announced that all of the other natives had fled for parts unknown.

"The inn is deserted," announced Aleck. Even that colored wife of the proprietor is gone.

"And did you find any trace of Dick and my uncle?" asked Sam.

"We found out where dat struggle took place," answered, Aleck. "And Cujo reckons as how he can follow de trail if we don't wait too long to do it."

"Must go soon," put in Cujo for himself.

"Maybe tomorrow come big storm—den track all washed away."

Tom sighed and shook his head. "You can go on, but you'll have to leave me behind. I couldn't walk a hundred yards for a barrel of gold."

"Oh, we can't think of leaving you behind!" cried Sam.

"I'll tell you wot—Ise dun carry him, at least fe a spell," said Aleck, and so it was arranged.

Under the new order of things Cujo insisted on making a scouting tour first, that he might strike the trail before carrying them off on a circuitous route, thus tiring Aleck out before the real tracking began.

The African departed, to be gone the best Part of an hour. When he came back there was a broad grin of satisfaction on his homely features.

"Cujo got a chicken," he announced, producing the fowl. "And here am some werry good roots, too. Now va dinner befo' we start out."

"Right yo' am, Cujo!" cried Pop, and began to start up a fire without delay, while Cujo cleaned the fowl and mashed up the roots, which, when baked on a hot stone, tasted very much like sweet potatoes. The meal was enjoyed by all, even Tom eating his full share in spite of his swollen ankle, which was now gradually resuming its normal condition.

Cujo had found the trail at a distance of an eighth of a mile above the wayside hostelry. "Him don't lead to de ribber dare," he said. "But I dun think somet'ing of him."

"And what do you think?" asked Tom, from his seat on Aleck's back.

"I t'ink he go to de kolobo."

"And what is the kolobo?" asked Sam with interest.

"De kolobo old place on ribber-place where de white soldiers shoot from big fort-house."

"A fort!" cried Tom. "But would the authorities allow, them to go there?"

"No soldiers dare now—leave kolobo years ago. Place most tumble down now. But good place fo' robbers."

"I see. Well, follow the trail as best you can—and we'll see what we will see."

"And let us get along just as fast as we can," added Sam.

On they went through a forest that in spots was so thick they could scarcely pass. The jungle contained every kind of tropical growth, including ferns, which were beautiful beyond description, and tiny vines so wiry that they cut like a knife.

"This is tough," remarked Sam. "But I suppose it doesn't hold a candle to what is beyond."

"Werry bad further on," answered Cujo. "See, here am de trail," and he pointed it out.

Several miles were covered, when they came to a halt in order to rest and to give Aleck a let up in carrying Tom. The youth now declared his foot felt much better and hobbled along for some distance by leaning on Sam's shoulder.

Presently they were startled by hearing a cry from a distance. They listened intently, then Cujo held up his hand.

"Me go an' see about dat," he said. "Keep out ob sight, all ob you!" And he glided into the bushes with the skill and silence of a snake.

Another wait ensued, and Tom improved the time by again bathing his foot in a pool which was discovered not far from where Cujo had left them. The water seemed to do much good, and the youth declared that by the morrow he reckoned he would be able to do a fair amount of walking if they did not progress too rapidly.

"But what a country this is!" he murmured. "I declare they could burn wood night and day for a century and never miss a stick."

"I thought I heard some monkeys chattering a while ago," answered Sam. "I suppose the interior is alive with them."

"I dun see a monkey lookin' at us now, from dat tree," observed Aleck. "See dem shinin' eyes back ob de leaves?" He pointed with his long forefinger, and both, boys gazed in the direction. Then Tom gave a yell.

"A monkey? That's a snake! Look out for yourselves!"

He started back and the others did the same. And they were none too soon, for an instant later the leaves were thrust apart and a serpent's form appeared, swaying slowly to and fro, as if contemplating a drop upon their very heads!

CHAPTER XX

THE FIGHT AT THE OLD FORT

For the instant after the serpent appeared nobody spoke or moved. The waving motion of the reptile was fascinating to the last degree, as was also that beady stare from its glittering eyes. The stare was fixed upon poor Tom, and having retreated but a few feet, he now stood as though rooted to the spot. Slowly the form of the snake was lowered, until only the end of its tail kept it up on the tree branch. Then the head and neck began to swing back and forth, in a straight line with Tom's face.

The horrible fascination held the poor, boy as by a spell, and he could do nothing but look at those eyes, which seemed to bum themselves upon his very brain. Closer and closer, and still closer, they came to his face, until at last the reptile prepared to strike.

Crack! It was Sam's pistol that spoke up, at just the right instant, and those beady eyes were ruined forever, and the wounded head twisted in every direction, while the body of the serpent, dropping from the tree, lashed and dashed hither and thither in its agony. Then the spell was broken, and Tom let out such a yell of terror as had never before issued from his lips.

Crack! came a second shot from Sam's pistol. But the serpent was moving around too rapidly for a good aim to be taken, and only the tip of the tail was struck. Then, in a mad, blind fashion, the snake coiled itself upon Aleck's foot, and began, with lightning-like rapidity, to encircle the colored man's body.

"Help!" shrieked Aleck, trying to pull the snake off with his hands. "Help! or Ise a dead man, shuah!"

"Catch him by the neck, Aleck!" ejaculated Tom, and brought out his own pistol. Watching his chance, he pulled the trigger twice, sending both bullets straight through the reptile's body. Then Sam fired again, and the mangled head fell to the ground.

But dead or alive the body still encircled Aleck, and the contraction threatened to cave in the colored man's ribs.

"Pull him off somehow!" he gasped. "Pull him off!"

Crack! went Tom's pistol once more, and now the snake had evidently had enough of it, for it uncoiled slowly and fell to the ground in a heap, where it slowly shifted from one spot to another until life was extinct. But neither the boys nor the colored man waited to see if it was really dead. Instead, they took to their heels and kept on running until the locality was left a considerable distance behind.

"That was a close shave," said Tom, as he dropped on the ground and began to nurse his lame ankle once more. "Ugh! but that snake was enough to give one the nightmare!"

"Don't say a word," groaned Aleck, who had actually turned pale. "I vought shuah I was a goner, I did fo' a fac'! I don't want to meet no mo' snakes!"

The two boys reloaded their pistols with all rapidity, and this was scarcely accomplished when they heard Cujo calling to them. Soon the native put in an appearance. When told of what had happened he would not believe the tale until he had gone back to look at the dead snake.

"You werry lucky," he said. "Him big wonder um snake didn't kill all of yo'!"

Cujo had made an important discovery. He had located Captain Villaire's party at the old fort, and said that several French brigands were on guard, by the trail leading from the swamp and at the cliff overlooking the river.

"I see white boy dare too," he added. "Same boy wot yo' give money to in Boma."

"Dan Baxter!" ejaculated Sam. "Can it be possible that he is mixed up in this affair?"

"I can't understand it at all," returned Tom. "But the question is, now we have tracked the rascals, what is to be done next?"

After a long talk it was resolved to get as close to the old fort as possible. Cujo said they need not hurry, for it would be best to wait until nightfall before making any demonstration against their enemies. The African was very angry to think that the other natives had deserted the party, but this anger availed them nothing.

Four o'clock in the afternoon found them on the edge of the swamp and not far from the bank of the Congo. Beyond was the cliff, overgrown in every part with rank vegetation, and the ever-present vines, which hung down like so many ropes of green.

"If we want to get up the wall we won't want any scaling ladders," remarked Tom grimly. "Oh, if only we knew that Dick and Uncle Randolph were safe!"

"I'm going to find out pretty soon," replied Sam. "I'll tell you what I think. I think they are being held for ransom."

"I was thinking of that, too. But I didn't dream of such a thing being done down here although, I know it is done further north in Africa among the Moors and Algerians."

Cujo now went off on another scout and did not return until the sun was setting. Again he was full of smiles.

"I can show you a way up de rocks," he said. "We can get to the walls of um fort, as you call um, without being seen."

Soon night was upon them, for in the tropics there is rarely any twilight. Tom now declared himself able to walk once more, and they moved off silently, like so many shadows, beside the swamp and then over a fallen palm to where a series of rocks, led up to the cliff proper.

"Sh-ah!" came presently from Cujo. "Man ahead!"

They came to a halt, and through the gloom saw a solitary figure sitting on a rock. The sentinel held a gun over his knees and was smoking a cigarette.

"If he sees us he will give the alarm," whispered Tom. "Can't we capture him without making a noise?"

"Dat's de talk," returned Aleck. "Cujo, let us dun try dat trick."

Cujo nodded. "Urn boys stay here," he said. "Cujo fix dat feller!"

And off he crawled through the wet grass, taking a circuitous route which brought him up on the sentinel's left.

Presently the sentinel started to rise. As he did so Cujo leaped from the grass and threw him to the earth. Then a long knife flashed in the air. "No speak, or um diet" came softly; but, the Frenchman realized that the African meant what he said.

"I will be silent!" he growled, in the language of the African. "Don't—don't choke me."

Cujo let out a low whistle, which the others rightly guessed was a signal for them to come up. Finding himself surrounded, the Frenchman gave up his gun and other weapons without a struggle. He could talk no English, so what followed had to be translated by Cujo.

"Yes, de man an' boy are dare," explained Cujo, pointing to the fort. "Da chained up, so dis rascal say. De captain ob de band want heap money to let um go."

"Ask him how many of the band there are," asked Sam.

But at this question the Frenchman shook his head. Either he did not know or would not tell.

After a consultation the rascal was made to march back to safer ground. Then he was strapped to a tree and gagged. The straps were not fastened very tightly, so that the man was sure to gain his liberty sooner or later. "If we didn't come back and he was too tight he might starve to death," said Tom.

"Not but wot he deserves to starve," said Aleck, with a scowl at the crestfallen prisoner.

At the foot of the cliff all was as dark and silent as a tomb. "We go slow now, or maybe take a big tumble," cautioned Cujo. "Perhaps him better if me climb up first," and he began the dangerous ascent of the cliff by means of the numerous vines already mentioned.

He was halfway up when the others started after him, Sam first, Tom next, and Aleck bringing up in the rear.

Slowly they arose until the surface of the stream was a score or more of feet below them. Then came the sounds of footsteps from above and suddenly a torch shone down into their upturned faces.

"Hullo, who's this?" came in English and the Rover boys recognized Dan Baxter.

"Silence, on your life!" cried Tom.

"Tom Rover!" gasped the bully. "How came you—"

"Silence, Baxter! I have a pistol and you know I am a good shot. Stand where you an and put both hands over your head."

"Will I stand? Not much!" yelled the bully, and flung his torch straight at Tom. Then he turned and ran for the fort, giving the alarm at the top of his lungs.

The torch struck Tom on the neck, and for the moment the youth was in danger of losing his hold on the vines and tumbling to the jagged rocks below. But then the torch slipped away, past Sam and Aleck, and went hissing into the dark waters of the Congo.

By this time Cujo had reached the top of the cliff and was making after Baxter. Both gained the end of the fort at the same time and one mighty blow from Cujo's club laid Baxter senseless near the doorway.

"Help! help!" The cry came in Dick's voice, and was plainly heard by Sam and Tom. Then Captain Villaire appeared, and a rough and tumble battle ensued, which the Rovers well remember to this day.

But Tom was equal to the occasion, and after the first onslaught he turned, as if summoning help from the cliff. "This way!" he cried. "Tell the company to come up here and the other company can surround the swamp!"

Several pistol shots rang out, and the boys saw a Frenchman go down with a broken arm. Then Captain Villaire shouted: "We have been betrayed—we must flee!" The cry came in French, and as if by magic the brigands disappeared into the woods behind the old fort; and victory was upon the side of our friends.

CHAPTER XXI

INTO THE HEART OF AFRICA

"Well, I sincerely trust we have no more such adventures."

The speaker was Randolph Rover. He was seated on an old bench in one of the rooms of the fort, binding up a finger which had been bruised in the fray. It was two hours later, and the fight had come to an end some time previous. Nobody was seriously hurt, although Sam, Dick, and Aleck were suffering from several small wounds. Aleck had had his ear clipped by a bullet from Captain Villaire's pistol and was thankful that he had not been killed.

Baxter, the picture of misery, was a prisoner. The bully's face was much swollen and one eye was in deep mourning. He sat huddled up in a heap in a corner and wondering what punishment would be dealt out to him. "I suppose they'll kill me," he groaned, and it may be added that he thought he almost deserved that fate.

"You came just in time," said Dick. "Captain Villaire was about to torture us into writing letters home asking for the money he wanted as a ransom. Baxter put it into his head that we were very rich."

"Oh, please don't say anything more about it!" groaned the unfortunate bully. "I—that Frenchman put up this job all on his own hook."

"I don't believe it," came promptly from Randolph Rover. "You met him, at Boma; you cannot deny it."

"So I did; but he didn't say he was going to capture you, and I—"

"We don't care to listen to your falsehoods, Baxter," interrupted Dick sternly.

"You are fully as guilty as anybody. You admitted it before."

Cujo had gone off to watch Captain Villaire and his party. He now came back, bringing word that the brigand had taken a fallen tree and put out on the Congo and was drifting down the stream along with several of his companions in crime.

"Him won't come back," said the tall African. "Him had enough of urn fight."

Nevertheless the whole party remained on guard until morning, their weapons ready for instant use. But no alarm came, and when day, dawned they soon made sure that they had the entire locality around the old fort to themselves, the Frenchman with a broken arm having managed to crawl off and reach his friends.

What to do with Dan Baxter was a conundrum.

"We can't take him with us, and if we leave him behind he will only be up to more evil," said Dick. "We ought to turn him over to the British authorities."

"No, no, don't do that," pleaded the tall youth. "Let me go and I'll promise never to interfere with you again."

"Your promises are not worth the breath used in uttering them," replied Tom. "Baxter, a worse rascal than you could not be imagined. Why don't you try to turn over a new leaf?"

"I will—if you'll only give me one more chance," pleaded the former bully of Putnam Hall.

The matter was discussed in private and it was at last decided to let Baxter go, providing he would, promise to return straight to the coast.

"And remember," said Dick, "if we catch you following us again we will shoot you on sight."

"I won't follow—don't be alarmed," was the low answer, and then Baxter was released and conducted to the road running down to Boma. He was given the knife he had carried, but the Rovers kept his pistol, that he might not be able to take a long-range shot at them. Soon he was out of their sight, not to turn up again for a long while to come.

It was not until the heat of the day had been spent that the expedition resumed its journey, after, an excellent meal made from the supplies Captain Villaire's party had left behind in their hurried flight. Some of the remaining supplies were done up into bundles by Cujo, to replace those which had been lost when the natives hired by Randolph Rover had deserted.

"It's queer we didn't see anything of that man and woman from the inn," remarked Dick, as they set off. "I reckon they got scared at the very start."

They journeyed until long after nightfall, "To make up for lost time," as Mr. Rover expressed it, and so steadily did Cujo push on that when a halt was called the boys were glad enough to rest. They had reached a native village called Rowimu. Here Cujo was well known and he readily procured good accommodations for all hands.

The next week passed without special incident, excepting that one afternoon the whole party went hunting, bringing down a large quantity of birds, and several small animals, including an antelope, which to the boys looked like a Maine deer excepting for the peculiar formation of its horns.

"I wonder how Mr. Blaze is making out?" said Tom, when they were returning to camp from the hunt.

"Oh, I reckon he is blasting away at game," laughed Sam, and Tom at once groaned over the attempted joke.

"Perhaps we will meet him some day—if he's in this territory," put in Dick. "But just now I am looking for nobody but father."

"And so are all of us," said Tom and Sam promptly.

They were getting deeper and deeper into the jungle and had to take good care that they did not become separated. Yet Cujo said he understood the way perfectly and often proved his words by mentioning something which they would soon reach, a stream, a little lake, or a series of rocks with a tiny waterfall.

"Been ober dis ground many times," said the guide.

"I suppose this is the ground Stanley covered in his famous expedition along the Congo," remarked Dick, as they journeyed along. "But who really discovered the country, Uncle Randolph?"

"That is a difficult question to answer, Dick. The Portuguese, the Spanish, and the French all claim that honor, along with the English. I fancy different sections, were discovered by different nationalities. This Free State, you know, is controlled by half a dozen nations."

"I wonder if the country will ever be thoroughly civilized?"

"It will take a long while, I am afraid. Christianity will have to come first. Many of the tribes in Africa are, you must remember, without any form of religion whatever, being even worse than what we call heathens, who worship some sort of a God."

"Don't they believe in anything?" asked Sam.

"Nothing, Sam. And their morality is of the lowest grade in consequence. They murder and steal whenever the chance offers, and when they think the little children too much care for them they pitch them into the rivers for the crocodiles to feed upon."

"The beasts!" murmured Tom. "Well, I reckon at that rate, civilization can't come too quick, even if it has to advance behind bayonets and cannon."

CHAPTER XXII

A HURRICANE IN THE JUNGLE

On and on went the expedition. In the past many small towns and villages had been visited where there were more or less white people; but now they reached a territory where the blacks held full sway, with—but this was rarely—a Christian missionary among them.

At all of the places which were visited Cujo inquired about King Susko and his people, and at last learned that the African had passed to the southeast along the Kassai River, driving before him several hundred head of cattle which he had picked up here and there.

"Him steal dat cattle," explained Cujo, "but him don't say dat stealin', him say um—um—"

"A tax on the people?" suggested Dick.

"Yes, um tax. But him big Vief."

"He must be, unless he gives the people some benefit for the tax they are forced to pay," said Tom.

At one of the villages they leaned that there was another American Party in that territory, one sent out by an Eastern college to collect specimens of the flora of central Africa. It was said that the party consisted of an elderly man and half a dozen young fellows.

"I wouldn't mind meeting that crowd," said Sam. "They might brighten up things a bit."

"Never mind; things will pick up when once we meet King Susko," said Dick. "But I would like to know where the crowd is from and who is in it."

"It's not likely we would know them if they are from the East," said Sam. "Probably they hail from Yale or Harvard."

Two days later the storm which Cujo had predicted for some time caught them while they were in the midst of an immense forest of teak and rosewood. It was the middle of the afternoon, yet the sky became as black as night, while from a distance came the low rumble of thunder. There was a wind rushing high up in the air, but as yet this had not come down any further than the treetops. The birds of the jungle took up the alarm and filled the forest with their discordant cries, and even the monkeys, which were now numerous, sit up a jabber which would have been highly trying to the nerves of a nervous person.

"Yes, we catch um," said Cujo, in reply to Dick's question. "Me look for safe place too stay."

"You think the storm will be a heavy one?" asked Randolph Rover anxiously.

"Werry heavy, massah; werry heavy," returned Cujo. "Come wid me, all ob you," and he set off on a run.

All followed as quickly as they could, and soon found themselves under a high mass of rocks overlooking the Kassai River. They had hardly gained the shelter when the storm burst over their heads in all of its wild fury.

"My, but this beats anything that I ever saw before!" cried Sam, as the wind began to rush by them with ever-increasing velocity.

"Him blow big by-me-by," said Cujo with a sober face. "Him big storm, dis."

"The air was full of a moanin' sound," to use Aleck's way of expressing it. It came from a great distance and caused the monkeys and birds to set up more of a noise than ever. The trees were now swaying violently, and presently from a distance came a crack like that of a big pistol.

"Was that a tree went down?" asked Randolph Rover, and Cujo nodded. "It is a good thing, then, that we got out of the forest."

"Big woods werry dangerous in heap storm like dis," answered the African. "Tree come down, maybe kill um. Hark! now um comin'!"

He crouched down between two of the largest rocks and instinctively the others followed suit. The "moanin" increased until, with a roar and a rush, a regular tropical hurricane was upon them. The blackness of the atmosphere was filled with flying tree branches and scattered vines, while the birds, large and small, swept past like chips on a swiftly flowing river, powerless to save themselves in those fierce gusts.

"Keep down, for your lives!" shouted Randolph Rover; but the roar of the elements drowned out his voice completely. However, nobody thought of rising, and the tree limbs and vines passed harmlessly over their heads.

The first rush of wind over, the rain began, to fall, at first in drops as big as a quarter-dollar and then in a deluge which speedily converted the hollows among the rocks into deep pools and soaked everybody to his very skin. Soon the water was up to their knees and pouring down into the river like a regular cataract.

"This is a soaker and no mistake," said Sam, during a brief lull in the downpour. "Why, I never saw so much water come down in my life."

"It's a hurricane," answered Randolph Rover, "It may keep on—"

He got no further, for at that instant a blinding flash of lightning caused everybody to jump in alarm. Then came an ear-splitting crack of thunder and up the river they saw a magnificent baobab tree, which had reared its stately head over a hundred feet high from the ground, come crashing down, split in twain as by a Titan's ax. The blackened stump was left standing, and soon—this burst into flames, to blaze away until another downpour of rain put out the conflagration.

"My, but that dun been awful!" murmured Aleck with a shiver. "Ise glad we didn't take no shelter under dat tree."

"Amen," said Tom. He had been on the point of making some joke about the storm, but now the fun was knocked completely out of him.

It rained for the rest of the day and all of the night, and for once all hands felt thoroughly, miserable. Several times they essayed to start a fire, by which to dry themselves and make something hot to drink, but each time the rain put out the blaze. What they had to eat was not only

cold, but more or less water-soaked, and it was not until the next noon that they managed to cook a meal.

When at last the sun did come out, however, it shone, so Sam put it, "with a vengeance." There was not a cloud left, and the direct rays of the great orb of day caused a rapid evaporation of the rain, so that the ground seemed to be covered with a sort of mist. On every side could be seen the effects of the hurricane-broken trees, washed-out places along the river, and dead birds and small animals, including countless monkeys. The monkeys made the boys' hearts ache, especially one big female, that was found tightly clasping two little baby monkeys to her breast.

The storm had swollen the river to such an extent that they were forced to leave the beaten track Cujo had been pursuing and take to another trail which reached out to the southward. Here they passed a small village occupied entirely by negroes, and Cujo learned from them that King Susko had passed that way but five days before. He had had no cattle with him, the majority of his followers having taken another route. It was thought by some of the natives that King Susko was bound for a mountain known as the Hakiwaupi—or Ghost-of-Gold.

"The Ghost-of-Gold!" repeated Dick. "Can that be the mountain father was searching for when he came to Africa?"

Inquiries from Cujo elicited the information that the mountain mentioned was located about one hundred miles away, in the center of an immense plain. It was said to be full of gold, but likewise haunted by the ghost of a departed warrior known to the natives as Gnu-ho-mumoli —Man-of-the-Gnu-eye.

"I reckon that ghost story, was started, by somebody who wanted, to keep the wealth of che mountain to himself," observed Tom. "I don't believe in ghosts, do you, Cujo?"

The tall African shrugged his ebony shoulders, "Maybe no ghost—but if dare is, no want to see 'um," he said laconically. Nevertheless he did not object to leading them in the direction of the supposedly haunted mountain.

So far the natives had been more or less friendly, but now those that were met said but little to Cujo, while scowls at the whites were frequent. It was learned that the college party from the East was in the vicinity.

"Perhaps they did something to offend the natives," observed Randolph Rover. "As you can see, they are simple and childlike in their ways, and as quickly offended on one hand as they are pleased on the other. All of you must be careful in your treatment of them, otherwise we may get into serious trouble."

CHAPTER XXIII

DICK MEETS AN OLD ENEMY

One afternoon Dick found himself alone near the edge of a tiny lake situated on the southern border of the jungle through which the party had passed. The others had gone up the lake shore, leaving him to see what he could catch for supper.

He had just hooked a magnificent fish of a reddish-brown color, when, on looking up, he espied an elderly man gazing at him intently from a knoll of water-grass a short distance away.

"Richard Rover, is it—ahem—possible?" came slowly from the man's thin lips. "Surely I must be dreaming!"

"Josiah Crabtree!" ejaculated Dick, so surprised that he let the fish fall into the water again. "How on earth did you get out here?"

"I presume I might—er—ask that same question," returned the former teacher of Putnam Hall. "Did you follow me to Africa?"

"Do you imagine I would be fool enough to do that, Mr. Crabtree? No, the Stanhopes and I were content to let you go—so long as you minded your own business in the future."

"Do not grow saucy, boy; I will not stand it."

"I am not saucy, as you see fit to term it, Josiah Crabtree. You know as well as I do that you ought to be in prison this minute for plotting the abduction of Dora."

"I know nothing of the kind, and will not waste words on you. But if you did not follow me why are you here?"

"I am here on business, and not ashamed to own it."

"Indeed. And you—did you come in search of your missing father?"

"I did."

"You once said he was missing. It is a long journey for one so young."

"It's a queer place for you to come to."

"I am with an exploring party from Yale College. We are studying the fauna and flora of central Africa—at least, they are doing so under my guidance."

"They must be learning a heap—under you."

"Do you mean to say I am not capable of teaching them!" cried Josiah Crabtree, wrathfully.

"Well, if I was in their place I would want somebody else besides the man who was discharged by Captain Putnam and who failed to get the appointment he wanted at Columbia College because he could not stand the examination."

"Boy! Boy! You know nothing of my ability!" fumed Crabtree, coming closer and shaking, his fist in Dick's face.

"Well, I know something of your lack of ability."

"You are doing your best to insult me!"

"Such an old fraud as you cannot be insulted, Josiah Crabtree. I read your real character the first time I met you, and you have never done anything since which has caused me to alter my opinion of you. You have a small smattering of learning and you can put on a very wise look when occasion requires. But that is all there is to it, except that behind it all you are a thorough-paced scoundrel and only lack a certain courage to do some daring bit of rascality."

This statement of plain truths fairly set Josiah Crabtree to boiling with rage. He shook his fist in Dick's face again. "Don't dare to talk that way, Rover; don't dare—or—I'll—I'll—"

"What will you do?"

"Never mind; I'll show you when the proper time comes."

"I told you once before that I was not afraid of you—and I am not afraid of you now."

"You did not come to Africa alone, did you?"

"To be sure I did not. I have a large party with me."

"In this vicinity?"

"Yes, within calling distance. I tell you that—and it's the truth—so that you won't try any underhand game on me."

"You—you—" Josiah Crabtree broke off and suddenly grew nervous. "See here, Rover, let us be friends," he said abruptly. "Let us drop the past and be friends-at least, so long as we are so far away from home and in the country of the enemy."

This sudden change in manner astonished Dick. Was Crabtree serious? Certainly the man's manner would indicate as much.

"Well, I'm willing to let past matters, drop—just for the present," he answered, hardly knowing what to say. "I wish to pay all my attention to finding my father."

"Exactly, Richard—and—er—you—who is with you? Anybody I know?"

"Sam and Dick and Alexander Pop."

"Is it possible! And that black, how is it he came along?"

"He joined us by accident. But what of your party?"

"They are a set of rich young students from Yale in their senior year who engaged me to bring them hither for study and—er—recreation. And that puts me in mind. You will not—ahem—say anything about the past to them, will you?"

CHAPTER XXIV

JOSIAH CRABTREE MAKES A MOVE

As quick as a flash of lightning Dick saw through Josiah Crabtree's scheme for, letting matters Of the past drop. The former teacher of Putnam Hall was afraid the youth would hunt up the college students from Yale and expose him to them.

As a matter of fact, Crabtree was already "on the outs" with two of the students, and he was afraid that if the truth regarding his character became known his present position would be lost to him and he would be cast off to shift for himself.

"You don't want me to speak to the students under your charge?" said Dick slowly.

"Oh, of course you can speak to them, if you wish. But I—ahem—I would not care to—er—er—"

"To let them know what a rascal you are," finished Dick. "Crabtree, let me tell you once for all, that you can expect no friendship, from me. You are not worthy of it. When I meet those students I will tell them whatever I see fit."

At these words Josiah Crabtree grew as white as a sheet. Then, setting his teeth, he suddenly recovered. "Are those your friends?" he demanded, pointing up the lake shore.

As was perfectly natural, Dick turned to gaze in the direction. As he did so, Crabtree swung a stick that he carried into the air and brought it down with all force on the youth's head. Dick felt a terrific pain, saw a

million or more dancing lights flash through his brain—and then he knew no more.

"I guess I've fixed him," muttered the former teacher of Putnam Hall grimly. He knelt beside the fallen boy and felt of his heart. "Not dead, but pretty well knocked out. Now what had I best do with him?"

He thought for a moment, then remembered a deep hollow which he had encountered but a short while before. Gazing around, to make certain that nobody was watching him, he picked up the unconscious lad and stalked off with the form, back into the jungle and up a small hill.

At the top there was a split between the rocks and dirt, and into this he dropped poor Dick, a distance of twenty or more feet. Then he threw down some loose leaves and dead tree branches.

"Now I reckon I am getting square with those Rovers," he muttered, as he hurried away.

The others of the Rover party wondered why Dick did not join them when they gathered around the camp-fire that night.

"He must be done fishing by this time," said Tom. "I wonder if anything has happened to him?"

"Let us take a walk up de lake an' see," put in Aleck, and the pair started off without delay.

They soon found the spot where Dick had been fishing. His rod and line lay on the bank, just as he had dropped it upon Josiah Crabtree's approach.

"Dick! Dick! Where are you?" called out Tom.

No answer came back at first. Then, to Tom's astonishment, a strange voice answered from the woods: "Here I am! Where are you?"

"Dat aint Dick," muttered Aleck. "Dat's sumbuddy else, Massah Tom."

"So it is," replied Tom, and presently saw a tall and well-built young man struggling forth from the tall grass of the jungle.

"Hullo, what are you?" demanded the newcomer, as he stalked toward them.

"I guess I can ask the same question," laughed Tom. "Are you the Dick who just answered me?"

"I am Dick Chester. And who are you?"

"Tom Rover. I am looking for my brother Dick, who was fishing here a while ago. Are you one of that party of college students we have heard about?"

"Yes, I'm a college student from Yale. May I ask where you come from?"

In a brief manner Tom told Dick Chester. "We can't imagine what has become of my brother Dick," he went on.

"Perhaps a lion ate him up," answered the Yale student. "No, you needn't smile. We saw a lion only yesterday. It nearly scared Mr. Crabtree into a fit."

"Mr. Crabtree!" burst Torn. "Josiah Crabtree?"

"The same. Do you know him?"

"Indeed I do—to my sorrow. He used to be a teacher at the academy I and my brothers attend. But he was discharged. He's a regular rascal."

"You are sure of that?" queried Dick Chester. "I have thought so all along, but the others, would hardly believe it."

"I am telling the truth, and can prove all I say. But just now I am anxious about my brother. You say you saw a lion?"

"Yes. He was across the lake; but Mr. Crabtree was scared to death and ran away. Frank Rand and I took shots at the beast, but I can't say if we hit him."

"It would be too bad if Dick dunh fell into dat lion's clutches," put in Aleck. "I reckon de lion would chaw him up in no time."

"Go back and call Cujo," said Tom. "He may be able to track my brother's footsteps."

At once Aleck loped off. While he was gone Tom told Dick Chester much concerning himself, and the college student related several facts in connection with the party to which he belonged.

"There are six of us students," he said. "We were going to have a professor from Yale with us, but he got sick at the last moment and we hired Josiah Crabtree. I wish we hadn't done it now, for he has proved more of a hindrance than a help, and his real knowledge of fauna and flora could be put in a peanut shell, with room to spare."

"He's a big brag," answered Tom. "Take my advice and never trust him too far—or you may be sorry for it."

Presently Aleck came back, with Cujo following. The brawny African began at once to examine the footprints along the lake shore.

"Him been here," he said. "Him came up dis way. But him no walk away."

"Didn't walk away!" ejaculated Tom.

"No. Udder footprints walk away, but not um Massah Dick."

"I don't understand, Cujo. Do you think he—fell into the lake?"

"Perhaps, Massah Tom—or maybe he get into boat."

Tom shook his head. "I don't know of any boats around here—do you?" he asked of Dick Chester.

"No," returned the young man from Yale. "But the natives living in the vicinity may have them."

"Perhaps a native dun carry him off," said Aleck. "He must be sumwhar, dat am certain."

"Yes, he must be somewhere," repeated Tom sadly.

By this time Sam and Randolph Rover were coming up, and also one of Dick Chester's friends. The college students were introduced to the others by Tom, and then a general hunt began for Dick, which lasted until the shades of night had fallen. But poor Dick was not found, and all wondered greatly what had, become of him.

Tom and the others retired at ten o'clock. But not to sleep, for with Dick missing none of the Rovers could close an eye. "We must find him in the morning," said Sam. "We simply must!" And the others agreed with him.

CHAPTER XXV

DICK AND THE LION

When poor Dick came to his senses he was lying in a heap on the decayed leaves at the bottom of the hollow between the rocks. The stuff Josiah Crabtree had thrown down still lay on top, of him, and it was a wonder that he had not been smothered.

"Where in the world am I?" was the first thought which crossed his confused mind. He tried to sit up, but found this impossible until he had scattered the dead leaves and tree branches. Even then he was so bewildered that he hardly knew what to do, excepting to stare around at his strange surroundings. Slowly the truth dawned upon him—how Josiah Crabtree had struck him down on the lake shore.

"He must have brought me here," he murmured. "Perhaps he thought I was dead!"

Although Dick did not know it, he had been at the bottom of the hollow all evening and all night. The sun was now up once more, but it was a day later than he imagined.

The hollow was damp and full of ants and other insects, and as soon as he felt able the youth got up. There was a big lump behind his left ear where the stick had descended, and this hurt not a little.

"I'll get square with him some day," he muttered, as he tried to crawl out of the hollow. "He has more courage to play the villain than I gave him credit for. Sometime I'll face him again, and then things will be different."

It was no easy matter to get out of the hollow. The sides were steep and slippery, and four times poor Dick tried, only to slip back to the bottom. He was about to try a fifth time, when a sound broke upon his ears which caused him great alarm. From only a short distance away came the muffled roar of a lion.

Dick had never heard, this sound out in the open before, but he had heard it a number of times at the circus and at the menagerie in Central Park, New York, and he recognized the roar only too well.

"A lion!" he thought. "My gracious! I trust he isn't coming this way!"

But he was coming that way, as Dick soon discovered. A few seconds of silence were followed by another roar which to, the alarmed youth appeared to come from almost over his head. Then came a low whine, which was kept up for fully a minute, followed by another roar. Dick hardly knew what was best—to remain at the bottom of the hollow or try to escape to some tree at the top of the opening. "If I go up now he may nab me on sight," he thought dismally. "Oh, if only I had my—thank Heaven, I have!"

Dick had felt for his pistol before, to find it gone. But now he spotted the glint of the shiny barrel among the leaves. The weapon had fallen from his person at the time Crabtree had pitched him into the hollow. He reached for it, and to his joy found that it was fully loaded and ready for use.

Presently he heard the bushes overhead thrust aside, and then came a half roar, half whine that made him jump. Looking up, he saw a lion standing on the edge of the hollow facing him.

The monarch of the forest was holding one of his forepaws up and now he sat down on his haunches to lick the limb. Then he set up another whine and shook the limb painfully.

"He has hurt that paw," thought Dick. "Wonder if he sees me?"

Yes, he did see, just at that instant, and started back in astonishment. Then his face took on a fierce look and he gave a roar which could be heard for miles around.

Crack! It was the report of Dick's pistol, but the youth was nervous, and the bullet merely glanced along the lion's body, doing little or no

damage. The beast roared again, then crouched down and prepared to leap upon the youth.

But the wounded forepaw was a hindrance to the lion's movements, and he began to crawl along the hollow's edge, seeking a better point from which to make a leap.

Then Dick's pistol spoke up a second time.

This shot was a far better one, and the bullet passed directly through the knee-joint of the lion's left forepaw. He was now wounded in both fore limbs, and set up a roar which seemed to fairly make the jungle tremble. Twice he started to leap down into the hollow, but each time retreated to shake one wounded limb after another into the air with whines of pain and distress.

As soon as the great beast reappeared once more Dick continued his firing. Soon his pistol was empty, but the lion had not been hit again. In nervous haste the lad started to re-load only to find that his cartridge box was empty.

"Get out!" he yelled at the lion, and threw a stone at the beast. But the lion was now determined to descend into the hollow, and paused only to calculate a sure leap to the boy's head.

But that pause, brief as it was, was fatal to the calculations of the monarch of the jungle. From his rear came two shots in rapid succession, each hitting him in a vulnerable portion of his body. He leaped up into the air, rolled over on the edge of the hollow, and then came down, head first, just grazing Dick's arm, and landing at the boy's feet, stone dead.

"Hurrah! I reckon I hit him!" came in Tom Rover's voice.

"And so did I," came from Randolph Rover.

"But he has disappeared."

"This way, Tom!" cried Dick, with all the strength he could command. He was shaking like a reed in the wind and all of the color had deserted his face.

"It's Dick!" ejaculated Tom. "I told you that I had heard several pistol shots."

Soon Tom and Mr. Rover presented themselves at the top of the hollow, followed by Aleck and Cujo. The latter procured a rope made of twisted vines, and by this Dick was raised up without much difficulty.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST OF JOSIAH CRABTREE

All listened intently to the story Dick had to tell, and he had not yet finished when Dick Chester presented himself, having been attracted to the vicinity by the roars of the lion and the various pistol and gun shots.

"This Crabtree must certainly be as bad as you represent," he said. "I will have a talk with him when I get back to our camp."

"It won't be necessary for you to talk to him," answered Dick grimly. "If you'll allow me, I'll do the talking."

"All right," grinned the Yale student. "Do, as you please. We are a getting tired of him."

Chester and Cujo descended into the hollow to examine the lion. There was a bullet in his right foreleg which Chester proved had come from his rifle. "He must be the beast Frank Rand and I fired at from across the lake. Probably he had his home in the hollow and limped over to it during the night."

"In that case you are entitled to your fair share of the meat—if you wish any," said Randolph Rover with a smile. "But I think the pelt goes to Tom, for he fired the shot that was really fatal." And that skin did go to Tom, and lies on his parlor floor at home today.

"Several of the students from Yale had been out on a long tour the afternoon before, in the direction, of the mountain, and they had reported meeting several natives who had seen King Susko. He was reported to have but half a dozen of his tribe with him, including a fellow known as Poison Eye.

"That's a bad enough title for anybody," said Sam with a shudder. "I suppose his job is to poison their enemies if they can't overcome them in regular battle."

"Um tell de thruf," put in Cujo. "Once de Mimi tribe fight King Susko, and whip him. Den Susko send Poison Eye to de Mimi camp. Next day all drink-water get bad, an' men, women, an' children die off like um flies."

"That's cheerful information," said Tom.

"And why didn't they slay the poisoner?"

"Eberybody 'fraid to touch him—'fraid he be poisoned."

"I'd run my chances—providing I had a knife or a club," muttered Tom.

"Or a pistol," finished Sam. "Such rascals are not fit to live."

Dick, as can readily be imagined, was hungry, and before the party started back for the lake, the youth was provided with some food which Aleck had very thoughtfully carried with him.

It was learned that the two parties were encamped not far apart, and Dick Chester said he would bring his friends to, see them before the noon hour was passed.

"I don't believe he will bring Josiah Crabtree," said Tom. "I reckon Crabtree will take good care to keep out of sight."

Tom was right. When Chester came over with his friends he said that the former teacher of Putnam Hall was missing, having left word that he was going around the lake to look for a certain species of flower which so far they had been unable to add to their specimens.

"But he will have to come back," said the Vale student. "He has no outfit with which to go it alone."

He was right. Crabtree put in an appearance just before the sun set over the jungle to the westward. He presented a most woebegone appearance, having fallen into a muddy swamp on his face.

"I—I met with an—an unfortunate accident," he said to Chester. "I fell into the—ahem—mud, and it was only with great difficulty that I managed to—er—to extricate myself."

"Josiah Crabtree, you didn't expect to see me here, did you?" said Dick sternly, as he stepped forward. And then the others of his party also came out from where they had been hiding in the brush.

The former teacher of Putnam Hall started as if confronted by a ghost.

"Why—er—where did you come from, Rover?" he faltered.

"You know well enough where I came from, Josiah Crabtree," cried Dick wrathfully. "You dropped me into the hollow for dead, didn't you!"

"Why, I—er—that—is—" stammered Crabtree; but could actually go no further.

"Don't waste words on him, Dick," put in Tom. "Give him the thrashing he deserves."

"Thrashing!" gasped Crabtree.

"Yes, thrashing," replied Dick. "If we were in America I would have you locked up. But out here we must take the law into our own hands. I am going to thrash you to the very best of my ability, and after that, if I meet you again I'll—I'll—"

"Dun shoot him on sight," suggested Aleck.

"You shall not touch me!" said the former teacher with a shiver. "Chester—Rand—will you not aid me against this—er—savage young brute?"

"Don't you call Dick a brute," put in Sam.

"If there is any brute here it is you, and everyone in our party will back up what I say."

"Mr. Crabtree, I have nothing to say in this matter," said Dick Chester. "It would seem that your attack on Rover was a most atrocious one, and out here you will have to take what punishment comes."

"But you will help me, won't you, Rand?" pleaded the former teacher, nervously.

"No, I shall stand by Chester," answered Rand.

"And will you, too, see me humiliated?" asked Crabtree, turning to the other Yale students. "I, the head of your expedition into equatorial Africa!"

"Mr. Crabtree, we may as well come to an understanding," said one of the students, a heavyset young man named Sanders. "We hired you to do

certain work for us, and we paid you well for that work. Since we left America you have found fault with nearly everything, and in a good many instances which I need not recall just now you have not done as you agreed. You are not the learned scientist you represented yourself to be—instead, if we are to believe our newly made friends here, you are a pretender, a big sham, and a brute in the bargain. This being so, we intend to dispense with your services from this day forth. We will pay you what is coming to you, give you your share of our outfit, and then you can go your way and we will go ours. We absolutely want nothing more to do with you."

This long speech on Sanders' part was delivered amid a deathlike silence. As the student went on, Josiah Crabtree bit his lip until the blood came. Once his baneful eyes fairly flashed fire at Sanders and then at Dick Rover, but then they fell to the ground.

"And so you—ahem—throw me off," he said, drawing a long breath. "Very well. But I demand all that is coming to me."

"You shall have every cent."

"And a complete outfit, so that I can make my way back to the coast."

"All that is coming to you—no more and no less," said Sanders firmly.

"But he shan't go without that thrashing!" cried Dick, and catching up a long whip he had had Cujo cut for him he leaped upon Josiah Crabtree and brought down the lash with stinging effect across the former teacher's face, leaving a livid mark that Crabtree was doomed to wear to the day of his death. "There you are! And there is another for the way you treated Stanhope, and another for what you did to Dora, and one for Tom, and another for Sam, and another—"

"Oh! oh! let up! The boy will kill me!" shrieked Crabtree, trying to run away. "Don't—I will be cut to pieces! Don't! don't!" And as the lash came down over his head, neck, and shoulders, he danced madly around in pain. At last he broke for cover and disappeared, not to show himself again until morning, when he called Chester to him, asked for and received, what was coming to him, and departed, vowing vengeance on the Rovers and all of the others.

"He will remember you for that, Dick," said Sam, when the affair was over. "He will be your enemy for life."

"Let him be—I am not afraid of him," responded the elder brother.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAIN

By noon of the day following the Rover expedition was on its way to the mountain said to be so rich in gold. The students from Yale went with them.

"It's like a romance, this search after your father," said Chester to Dick. "I hope you find him. You can rest assured that our party will do all we can for you. Specimen hunting is all well enough, but man hunting is far more interesting."

"I would like to go on a regular hunt for big game some day," said Tom. He had already mentioned Mortimer Blaze to the Yale students.

"Yes, that's nice—if you are a crack shot, like Sanders. He can knock the spots from a playing card at a hundred yards."

"Maybe he's a Western boy," laughed Sam.

"He is. His father owns a big cattle ranch there, and Sanders learned to shoot while rounding up cattle. He's a tip-top fellow."

They had passed over a small plain and were now working along a series of rough rocks overgrown with scrub brush and creeping vines full of thorns. The thorns stuck everybody but Cujo, who knew exactly how to avoid them.

"Ise dun got scratched in 'steen thousand places," groaned Aleck. "Dis am worse dan a bramble bush twice ober, by golly!"

For two days the united expeditions kept on their way up the mountain side, which sloped gradually at its base, the steeper portion still being several days' journey distant.

During these days they shot several wild animals including a beautiful antelope, while Sam caught a monkey. But the monkey bit the boy in the shoulder, and Sam was glad enough to get rid of the mischievous creature.

On the afternoon of the second day Cujo, who was slightly in advance of the others, called a halt.

"Two men ahead ob us, up um mountain," he said. "Cujo Vink one of dern King Susko."

"I hope it is!" cried Dick quickly.

The discovery was talked over for a few minutes, and it was decided that Cujo should go ahead, accompanied by Randolph Rover and Dick. The others were to remain on guard for anything which might turn up.

Dick felt his heart beat rapidly as he advanced with his uncle and the African guide through the tangle of thorns and over the rough rocks. He felt that by getting closer to King Susko, he was also getting closer to the mystery which surrounded his father's disappearance.

"Dar him am!" whispered Cujo, presently. "See, da is gwine up into a big hole in de side ob de mountain?"

"Can you make out if it is Susko or not?"

"Not fo' certain, Massah Dick. But him belong to de Burnwo tribe, an' de udder man too."

"If they are all alone it will be an easy matter to capture them," said Randolph Rover. "All told, we are twelve to two."

"They have disappeared into the cave." Cried Dick a minute later. "Come on, and we'll soon know something worth knowing, I feel certain of it."

Cujo now asked that he be allowed to proceed alone, to make certain that no others of the Burnwo tribe were in the vicinity.

"We must be werry careful," he said. "Burnwos kill eberybody wot da find around here if not dare people."

"Evidently they want to keep the whole mountain of gold to themselves," observed Dick. "All right, Cujo, do as you think best—I know we can rely upon you."

After this they proceeded with more care than ever-along a rocky edge covered with loose stones. To one side was the mountain, to the other a sheer descent of several hundred feet, and the footpath was not over a yard wide.

"A tumble here would be a serious matter," said Randolph Rover. "Take good care, Dick, that you don't step on a rolling stone."

But the ledge was passed in safety, and in fifteen minutes more they were close to the opening is the side of the mountain. It was an irregular hole about ten feet wide and twice as high. The a rocks overhead stuck out for several yards, and from these hung numerous vines, forming a sort of Japanese curtain over the opening.

While the two Rovers waited behind a convenient rock, Cujo crawled forward on his hand and knees into the cave. They waited for ten minutes, just then it seemed an hour, but he did not reappear.

"He is taking his time," whispered Dick.

"Perhaps something has happened to him," returned Randolph Rover. "I do not like this oppressive silence. Have your pistol ready for use. We may need our weapons."

"I've had my pistol ready all along," answered the boy, exhibiting the weapon. "That encounter with the lion taught me a lesson. If Cujo—What's that?"

Dick broke off short, for a sound on the rocks above the cave entrance had reached his ears. Both gazed in the direction, but could see nothing.

"What alarmed you?" asked Randolph Rover hurriedly.

"I heard a rustling in the bushes up there perhaps, though, it was only a bird or some small animal."

"I can see nothing, Dick."

"Neither can I; but I am certain—Out of sight, Uncle Randolph, quick!"

Dick caught his uncle by the arm, and both threw themselves flat behind the rocks. Scarcely had they gone down than two spears came whizzing forward, one hitting the rocks and the other sailing over their heads and burying itself in a tree trunk several yards away. They caught

a glance of two natives on the rocks over them, but with the launching of the spears the Africans disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KING SUSKO

"My gracious, this is getting at close range!" burst out Dick, when he could catch his breath again. "Uncle Randolph, they meant to kill us!"

"Indeed they did, Dick. And this is no safe place for stopping. We must retreat."

"But Cujo—?"

"He must be cautioned." Randolph Rover raised his voice. "Cujo! Cujo! They have discovered us! Take care that they do not spear you."

No reply came back to this call, which was several times repeated. Then came a crash, as a big stone was hurled down, to split into a score of pieces on the rock which sheltered them.

"They mean to dislodge us," said Dick. "If they would only show themselves—"

He stopped, for he had seen one of the Bumwos peering over a mass of short brush directly over the cave entrance. Taking hasty aim with his pistol be fired.

A yell of pain followed, proving that the African had been hit. But the Bumwo was not seriously wounded, and soon he sent another stone at them, this time hitting Randolph Rover on the leg.

"Oh!" gasped Dick's uncle, and drew up that member with a wry face.

"Did he hurt you much, Uncle Randolph?"

"He hurt me enough. You villain, take that!" And now the man fired, but the bullet flew wide of its mark, for Randolph Rover had practiced but little with firearms.

They now thought it time to retreat, and, watching their chance, they ran from the rocks to the trees beyond. While they were exposed another spear was sent after them, cutting its way through Mr. Rover's hat brim and causing that gentleman to turn as pale as a sheet.

"A few inches closer and it would have been my head!" he ejaculated. "This is growing too warm for comfort. Perhaps we had better rejoin the others, Dick."

"Cujo! Cujo! Where are you?" cried the boy once more. But as before no answer came back.

The shots had alarmed the others of the expedition, and all were hurrying along the rocky ledge when Randolph Rover and Dick met them.

"We must turn back!" exclaimed Randolph Rover. "If you go ahead we may be caught in an ambush. The Bumwos have discovered our presence and mean to kill us if they can!"

Suddenly a loud, deep voice broke upon them, coming from the rocks over the cave entrance.

"White men must leave this mountain!" cried the voice. "This country belongs to the Bumwos. White man has no right here! Go! Go before it is too late!"

"Who is that who speaks?" demanded Randolph Rover.

"I am King Susko, chief of the Bumwos."

"Will you come and have a talk with us?"

"No want to talk. Want the white man to leave," answered the African chief, talking in fairly good English.

"We do not wish to quarrel with you, King Susko; but you will find it best for you if you will grant us an interview," went on Randolph Rover.

"The white man must go away from this mountain. I will not talk with him," replied the African angrily.

"Do you know why we are here?"

"To rob the Bumwos of their gold."

"No; we are looking for a lost man, one who came to this country years ago and one who was your prisoner—"

"The white man is no longer here—he went home long time ago."

"We do not believe you!" cried Tom. "You have him a prisoner, and unless you deliver him up you shall suffer dearly for it."

This threat evidently angered the African chief greatly, for suddenly a spear was launched at the boy, which pierced Tom's shoulder.

As Tom went down, a shout went up from the rocks, and suddenly a dozen or more Bumwos appeared, shaking their spears and acting as if they meant to rush down on the party below without further warning.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VILLAGE ON THE MOUNTAIN

"Tom is wounded!" shouted Sam. He ran to his brother, to find the blood flowing freely over Tom's shoulder. "Is it bad?" he asked.

"I—I guess not," answered Tom with a gasp of pain. Then, as full of pluck as usual, Tom raised his pistol and fired, hitting one of the Bumwos in the breast and sending him to the rear, seriously wounded.

It was evident that Cujo had been mistaken and that there were far more of their enemies around the mountain than they had anticipated. From behind the Rover expedition a cry arose, telling that more of the natives were coming from that direction.

"We are being hemmed in," said Dick Chester nervously. "Perhaps we had better retreat."

"No, let us make a stand," came from Rand. "I think a concerted volley from our pistols and guns will check their movements."

"Dat's de talk!" cried Aleck. "Give it to 'em hot!"

It was decided to await the closer approach of the Bumwos, and each of the party improved the next minute in seeing to it that his weapon was ready for use.

Suddenly a blood-curdling yell arose on the sultry air, and the Bumwos were seen to be approaching from two directions, at right angles to each other.

"Now then, stand firm!" cried Dick Rover, and began to fire at one of the approaching forces.

The fight that followed was, however, short and full of consternation to the Africans. One of the parties was led by King Susko himself, and the chief had covered less than half the distance to where the Americans stood when a bullet from Tom Rover's pistol reached him, wounding him in the thigh and causing him to pitch headlong on the grass.

The fall of the leader made the Africans set up a howl of dismay, and instead of keeping up the fight they gathered around their leader. Then, as the Americans continued to fire, they picked King Susko up and ran off with him. A few spears were hurled at our friends, but the whole battle, to use Sam's way of summing up afterward, was a regular "two-for-a-cent affair." Soon the Bumwos were out of sight down the mountain side.

The first work of our friends after they had made certain that the Africans had really retreated, was to attend to Tom's wound and the bruise Randolph Rover had received from the stone. Fortunately neither man nor boy was seriously hurt, although Tom carries the mark of the spear's thrust to this day.

"But I don't care," said Tom. "I hit old King Susko, and that was worth a good deal, for it stopped the battle. If the fight had kept on there is no telling how many of us might have been killed."

While the party was deliberating about what to do next, Cujo reappeared.

"I go deep into de cabe when foah Bumwos come on me from behind," he explained.

"Da fight an' fight an' knock me down an' tie me wid vines, an' den run away. But I broke loose from de vines an' cum just as quick as could run. Werry big cabe dat, an' strange waterfall in de back."

"Let us explore the cave," said Dick. "Somebody can remain on guard outside."

Some demurred to this, but the Rover boys could, not be held back, and on they went, with Aleck with them. Soon Randolph Rover hobbled after them, leaving Cujo and the college students to remain on the watch.

The cave proved to be a large affair, running all of half a mile under the mountain. There were numerous holes in the roof, through which the

sun shone down, making the use of torches unnecessary. To one side was a deep and swiftly flowing stream, coming from the waterfall Cujo had mentioned, and disappearing under the rocks near the entrance to the cavern.

"Gold, true enough!" shouted Dick, as he gazed on the walls of the cave. "Am I not right, Uncle Randolph?"

"You are, Dick; this is a regular cave of gold, and no mistake. No wonder King Susko wanted to keep us away!"

Soon the waterfall was gained. It was a fascinating scene to watch the sparkling sheet as it thundered downward a distance of fully a hundred feet. At the bottom was a pool where the water was lashed into a milky foam which went swirling round and round.

"Look! Look! The ghost!" suddenly cried Sam, and pointed into the falling water. "Oh, Uncle Randolph, did you ever see anything like it?" and he gave a shiver.

"There are no such things as ghosts, Sam," replied his uncle. "I see nothing."

"Stand here and look," answered Sam, and his uncle did as requested. Presently from out of the mist came the form of a man—the likeness of Randolph Rover himself!

"It is nothing but an optical illusion, Sam, such as are produced by some magicians on the theater stage. The sun comes down through yonder hole and reflects your image on the wet rock, which in turn reflects the form on the sheet of water."

"Gracious! And that must be the ghost the natives believe in," answered Sam. "I'm glad you explained it. I can tell you I was startled."

"Here is a path leading up past the waterfall," said Dick, who had been making an investigation. "Let us see what is beyond."

"Take care of where you go," warned Randolph Rover. "There may be some nasty pitfall there."

"I'll keep my eyes open," responded Dick.

He ascended the rocks, followed by Sam, while the others brought up in the rear. Up over the waterfall was another cave, long and narrow. There was now but little light from overhead, but far in the distance

could be seen a long, narrow opening, as if the mountain top had been, by some convulsion of nature, split in half.

"We are coming into the outer world again!" cried Dick, and ran forward. "Well, I never!" he ejaculated.

For beyond the opening was a small plain, covered with short grass and surrounded on every side by jagged rocks which arose to the height of fifty or sixty feet. In the center of the plain were a number of native huts, of logs thatched with palm.

CHAPTER XXX

FINDING THE LONG-LOST

"A village!" said Randolph Rover. "And not a soul in sight."

"There are several women and children," returned Tom, pointing to one of the huts. "I guess the men went away to fight us."

"Probably you are right, Tom. Let us investigate, but with caution."

As they advanced, the women and children set up a cry of alarm, which was quickly taken up in several of the other huts.

"Go away, white men; don't touch us!" cried one old woman.

"Have the white men come at last?" cried a voice in the purest English. "Thank God! Help me! Help!"

"It is my brother's voice!" gasped Randolph Rover. "Anderson! Anderson! We have come to save you!"

"Father!" came from the three Rover boys, and they rushed off in all haste toward the nut from which the welcome cry had proceeded.

Anderson Rover was found in the center of the hut, bound fast by a heavy iron chain to a post set deeply into the ground. His face was haggard and thin and his beard was all of a foot and a half long, while his hair fell thickly over his shoulders. He was dressed in the merest rags, and had evidently suffered much from starvation and from other cruel treatment.

"My sons!" he gasped, as the boys appeared. "Do I see aright, or is it only another of those wild dreams that have entered my brain lately?"

"Father; poor father!" burst out Dick, and hugged his parent around the neck.

"It's no dream, father; we are really here," put in Tom, as he caught one of the slender hands, while Sam caught the other.

"How thin you are!" said Sam. And then he added tenderly: "But we'll take good care of you, now we have found you."

"And Randolph!" murmured Anderson Rover, as the brother came up. "Oh, thank God! Thank God, for this!" and the tears began to flow down his cheeks. "How long I have waited! Many a time I thought to give up in despair!"

"We came as soon as we got that message you sent," answered Dick. "But that was long after you had sent it."

"And is the sailor, Converse, safe?"

"No; the sailor is dead."

"Too bad—he was the one friend I had here."

"And King Susko has kept you a prisoner all this while?" asked Randolph Rover.

"Yes; and he has treated me shamefully in the bargain. He imagined I knew all of the secrets of this mountain, of a gold mine of great riches, and he would not let me go; but, instead, tried to wring the supposed secret from me by torture."

"We will settle accounts with him some day," muttered Dick. "It's a pity Tom didn't kill him."

The native women and children were looking in at the doorway curiously, not knowing what to say or do. Turning swiftly, Dick caught one by the arm.

"The key to the lock," he demanded, pointing to the lock on the iron chain which bound Anderson Rover. "Give it to me."

But the woman shook her head, and pointed off in the distance.

"King Susko has the key," explained Anderson Rover. "You will have to break the chain," And this was at last done, although not without great difficulty.

In the meantime the natives were ordered to prepare a meal for Anderson Rover and all of the others, and Cujo was called that he might question the Africans in their own language.

The meal was soon forthcoming, the Bumwo women fearing that they would be slaughtered if they did not comply with the demands of the whites. To make sure that the food had not been poisoned, Dick made several of the natives eat portions of each dish. This made Cujo grin. "Um know a good deal," he remarked.

"Cujo was goin' to tell Dick to do dat."

"I am glad the women and children are here," said Randolph Rover. "We can take them with us when we leave and warn King Susko that if he attacks us we will kill them. I think he will rather let us go than see all of the women and children slaughtered."

While they ate, Anderson Rover told his story, which is far too long to insert here. He had found a gold mine further up the country and also this mountain of gold, but had been unable to do anything since King Susko had made him and the sailor prisoners. During his captivity he had suffered untold cruelties, but all this was now forgotten in the joy of the reunion with his brother and his three sons.

It was decided that the party should leave the mountain without delay, and Cujo told the female natives to get ready to move. At this they set up a loud protest, but it availed them nothing, and they soon quieted down when assured that no harm would befall them if they behaved.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION

Nightfall found the entire expedition, including the women and children, on the mountain side below the caves. As the party went down the mountain a strict watch was kept for the Bumwo warriors, and just as the sun was setting, they were discovered in camp on the trail to the northwest.

"We will send out a flag of truce," said Randolph Rover. "Cujo can talk to them."

This was done, and presently a tall Bumwo under chief came out in a plain to hold a mujobo, or "law talk."

In a few words Cujo explained the situation, stating that they now held in bondage eighteen women and children, including King Susko's favorite wife Afgona. If the whites were allowed to pass through the country unharmed until they, reached the village of Kwa, where the Kassai River joins the Congo, they would release all of the women and children at that point and they could go back to rejoin their husbands and fathers. If, on the other hand, the expedition was attacked the whites would put all of those in bondage to instant death.

It is not likely that this horrible threat would have been put into execution. As Dick said when relating the particulars of the affair afterward. "We couldn't have done such a terrible thing, for it would not have been human." But the threat had the desired effect, and in the morning King Susko, who was now on a sick bed, sent word that they should go through unmolested.

And go through they did, through jungles and over plains, across rivers and lakes and treacherous swamps, watching continually for their enemies, and bringing down many a savage beast that showed itself. On the return they fell in with Mortimer Blaze, and he, being a crack shot, added much to the strength of their command.

At last Kwa was reached, and here they found themselves under the protection of several European military organizations. The native women and children were released, much to their joy, and my readers can rest assured that these Africans lost no time in getting back to that portion of the Dark Continent which they called home.

From Kwa to Boma the journey was comparatively easy. At Stanley Pool they rested for a week, and all in the party felt the better for it.

"Some day I will go back and open up the mines I have discovered," said Anderson Rover. "But not now. I want to see my own dear native land first."

At Boma news awaited them. Josiah Crabtree had turned up and been joined by Dan Baxter, and both had left for parts unknown.

"I hope we never see them again," said Dick, and his brothers said the same.

An American ship was in port, bound for Baltimore, and all of our party, including the Yale students, succeeded in obtaining passage on her for home. The trip was a most delightful one, and no days could have been happier than those which the Rover boys spent grouped around their lather listening to all he had to tell of the numerous adventures which had befallen him since he had left home. A long letter was written to Captain Townsend, telling of the finding of Anderson Rover, and the master of the Rosabel was, later on, sent a gift of one hundred dollars for his goodness to the Rovers.

Of course Anderson Rover was greatly interested in what his sons had been doing and was glad to learn that they were progressing so finely at Putnam Hall.

"We will let Arnold Baxter drop," he said.

"He is our enemy, I know; but just now we will let the law take its course for the rascality he practiced in Albany."

"All right, father," answered Dick. "We can afford to let him drop, seeing how well things have terminated for ourselves."

"And how happy we are going to be," chimed in Sam.

"And how rich—when father settles up that mining claim in the West," put in Tom.

Here I must bring to a finish the story of the Rover boys' adventures in the jungles of Africa. They had started out to find their father, and they had found him, and for the time being all went well.

The home-coming of the Rovers was the occasion of a regular celebration at Valley Brook farm. The neighbors came in from far and wide and with them several people from the city who in former years had known Anderson Rover well.

It was a time never to be forgotten, and the celebration was kept up for several days. Captain Putnam was there, and with him came Frank, Fred, Larry, and several others. The captain apologized handsomely to Aleck for the way he had treated the colored man.

"I wish I had been with you," said Fred. "You Rover boys are wonders for getting around. Where will you go next?"

"I think we'll go West next," answered Dick. "Father wants to look up his mining interests, you know. We are going to ask him to take us along." They did go west, and what adventures they had will be related in a new volume, entitled "The Rover Boys Out West; or, The Search for a Lost Mine."

"But we are coming back to Putnam Hall first," added Tom. "Dear old Putnam Hall! I thought of it even in the heart of Africa!"

"And so did I," put in Sam. "I'll tell you, fellows, it's good enough to roam around, but, after all, there is no place like home."

And with this truthful remark from the youngest Rover, let us close this volume, kind reader, hoping that all of us may meet again in the next book of the series, to be entitled, "The Rover Boys Out West; or, The Search for a Lost Mine." In this story all of our friends will once more play important parts, and we will learn what the Baxters, father and son, did toward wresting the Rover Boys' valuable mining property from them. But for the time being all went well, and so good-by.

The End